RADIUM ISLAND

DAN PERRY ADVENTURE STORIES

KENT SAGENDORPH

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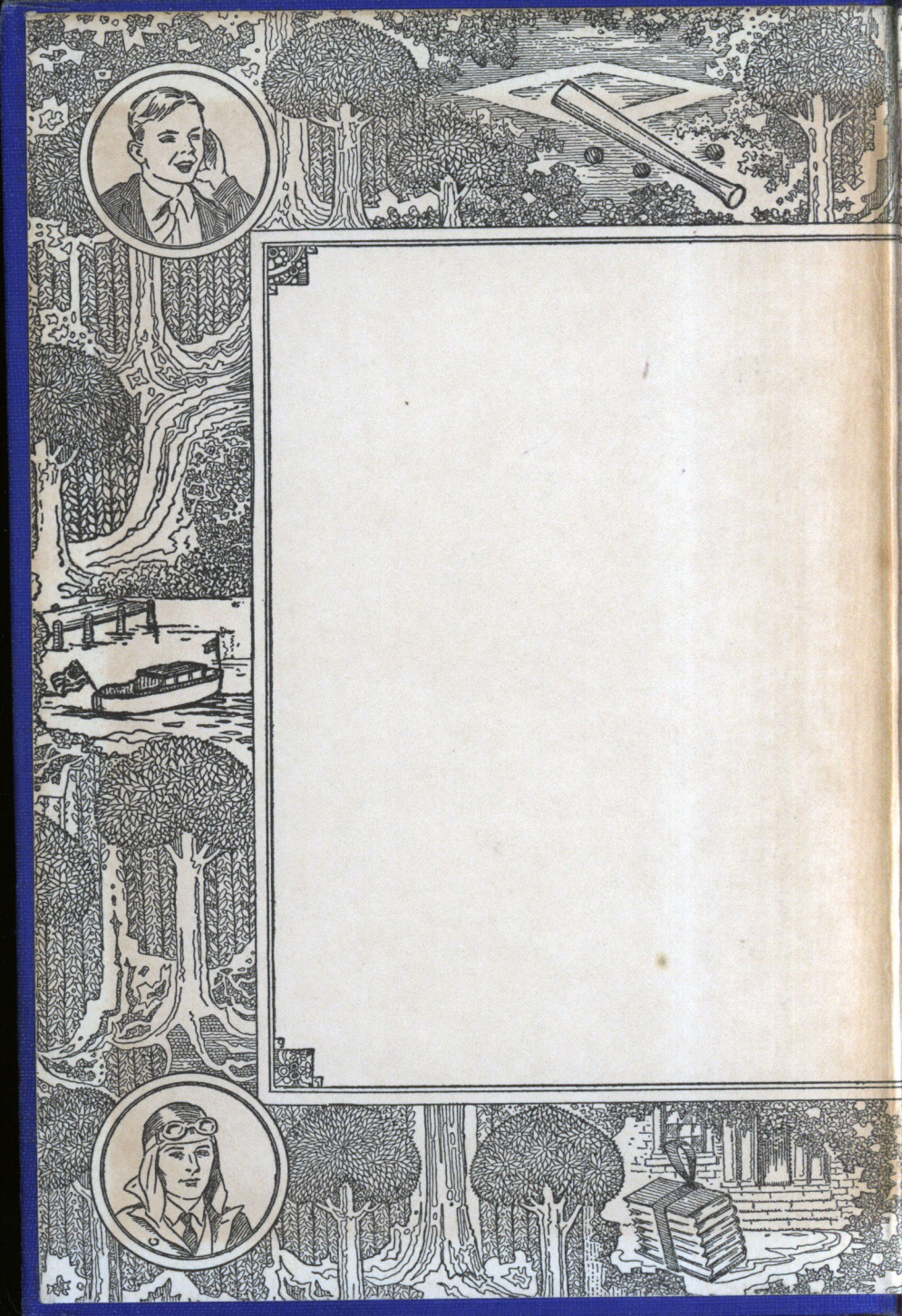

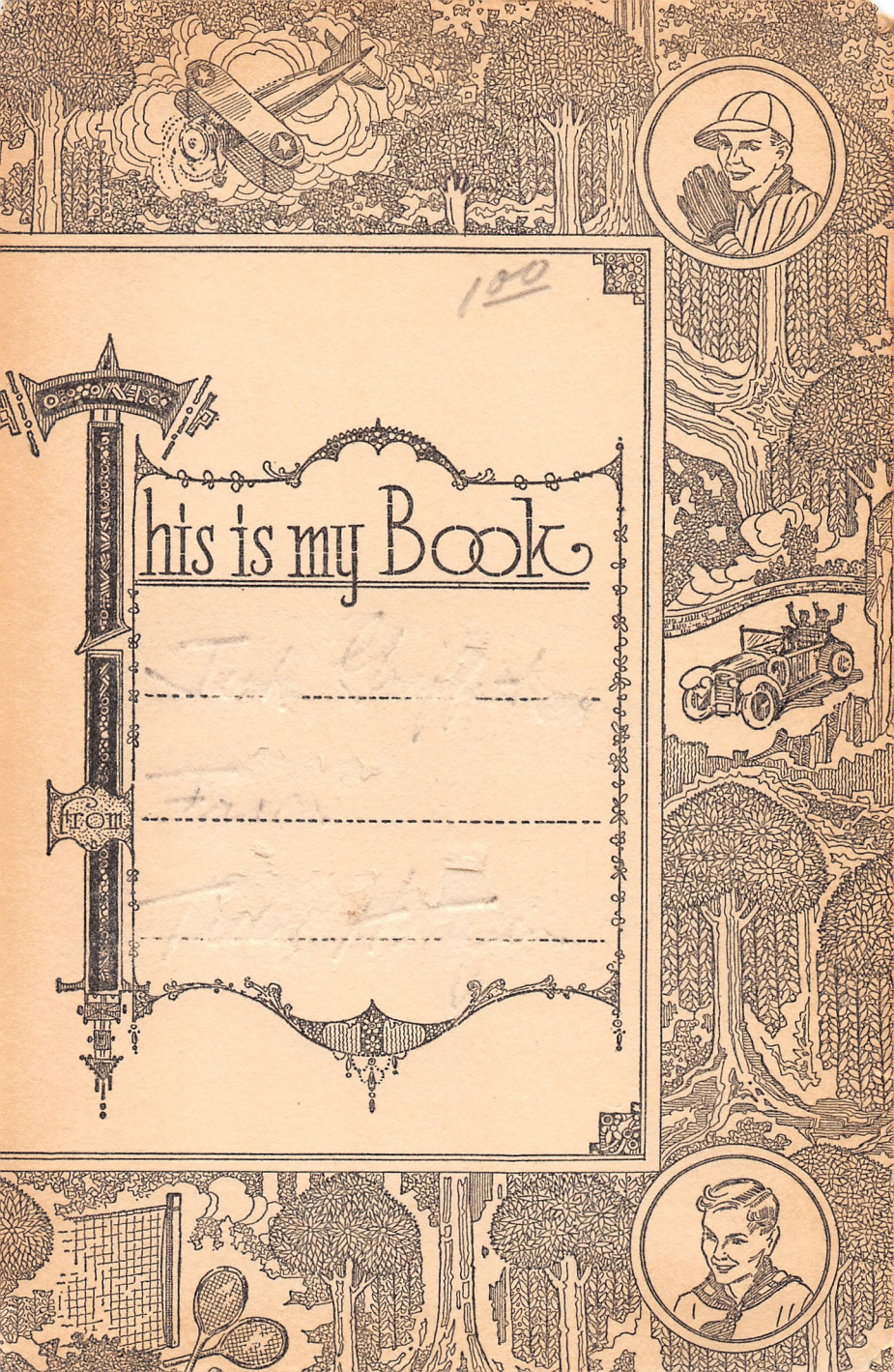
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This is my Book

DAN COULD SEE VARKOFSKY STRIDING UP AND DOWN THE LINE HELPLESSLY

"Radium Island"

(See page 193)

DAN PERRY ADVENTURE STORIES

RADIUM ISLAND

By

KENT SAGENDORPH

Author of
BEYOND THE AMAZON, SIN-KIANG CASTLE, ETC.

Illustrated

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RADIUM ISLAND

Printed in the United States of America

To

ERWIN BOSCA, JR.

In Whose Image
Dan Perry Was Created

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RADIUM ISLAND

Chapter I

PROPELLERS OVERHEAD

"Do you think you can fly her, Dan?"

"I'm going to find out right now, Shorty. Hop in!"

They were standing at the edge of the seaplane ramp at Perry Anchorage, Long Island. Shorty took a wistful look at the long, slim fuselage of the Lockheed Electra and wondered how any puny little human being could control that brute strength and that flashing speed. He ran his gaze over the tricky amphibian gear lately installed on the ship; the first adaptation of floats to an Electra ever attempted. The twin 900-h.p. radial engines were carefully booted over with their canvas weather covers, but the sharp-edged metal propellers told an eloquent story of the full-throated roar of power behind them. The elliptical fuselage seemed to Shorty like an animate creature; a high-spirited sky steed impatient to be off, pulling restlessly at its anchor to remind Dan of high adventure aloft, of thrills no earth-bound mortal could ever see.

Shorty's eyes took in every detail from the long

blunt nose to the steel-framed tail flippers. And then his attention turned to Dan Perry standing beside him. He gave Dan the same careful scrutiny.

Dan Perry, a youth somewhat taller than the average for his age, was standing on the seaplane ramp with his browned hands on his hips. He wasn't noticing Shorty at all. He very seldom did, Shorty complained to himself. Dan's attention was on the ship, and when Dan Perry concentrated, everything and everybody else might be on the moon as far as he was concerned. He was wearing a soiled pair of white ducks and a sturdy leather windbreaker. His curly chestnut hair was hidden under an unbuckled leather helmet and a big pair of rubber-rimmed flying goggles up on his forehead.

Shorty noticed Dan's eyes, a perfect mirror for every thought that passed through his head. They were narrowed a bit now, and half-closed in quiet calculation. But those eyes could blaze like beacons when Dan Perry flared up at some case of high-handed injustice. They could be soft and soothing when sympathy for an injured companion welled up within him. They could sparkle and twinkle when Shorty was outlining some practical joke to mystify Suki, their Jap cook.

Dan Perry was celebrating his eighteenth birthday by qualifying for a transport pilot's license. He was still wearing his helmet and goggles and windbreaker which he had donned that morning to take his flight tests at Roosevelt Field. Because he was under age for a full license, he had been piling up hours on his

student permit in every type of ship he could find. Right there at Perry Anchorage, his own home, he could fly most of the time, if he liked. His famous father owned the largest private airport on Long Island, and four well-equipped ships. Dan had literally been brought up in the air. And so had Shorty, for that matter.

Dan's father, Anson Perry, was at that moment in his study in the long Tudor mansion overlooking the Sound and his private airport. The name of Anson Perry was renowned in every corner of the world, honored by many foreign governments, piled with distinctions by his own beloved nation. He was the most famous commercial explorer of modern times, and his expeditions to remote spots on the globe had brought him not only an immense fortune but the wisdom and caution that go with experience. Men crossed oceans and continents to see him. There was one such visitor with him now, Dan remembered. He was a Russian.

Dan cast a final look at the eager Electra bobbing there at anchor, and decided to disturb him just a moment to get his father's permission to take the super-speed transport aloft for a short flight.

Dan put his hands in his pockets and started up the gravelled walk toward the house. Shorty fell into step beside him, his shorter legs bobbing hurriedly to keep up. Dan was nearly six feet, with the wide shoulders and supple muscles of an athlete. But Shorty Keenan was a foot less than that, although he weighed just as much as Dan. Shorty hated to

hear himself called fat. He was indignant about it. He was just plump, he said. That always drew a laugh from Dan.

Pausing at the door of his father's study, Dan and Shorty halted. They could hear voices raised in argument. They could hear the strong, firm voice of Anson Perry and then the louder, deeper bass rumble of the giant Russian. Presently there came a lull, and Dan opened the door.

"What is it?" Anson Perry asked, swinging around in his swivelled desk chair to face the door. There was a faint aroma of cigar smoke in the room, through which the gray temples of Dan's father looked almost white.

"How about taking that new ship up for a test, Dad?" Dan asked.

"Why, certainly," Mr. Perry nodded. "Don't be gone long. Suki will have dinner ready shortly. Dan, I don't think you know my guest. This is Mr. Varkofsky. Mr. Igor Varkofsky, the Russian engineer."

Dan crossed the room to shake hands. Tall as he was, Varkofsky towered above him with an ominous bulk of thick body and huge beard. His swarthy face was almost hidden behind that black beard, and above it were two luminous eyes—staring eyes, cruel eyes—the eyes of a cruel schemer who would stop at nothing if he were defied.

"How do you do, sir?" Dan volunteered.

"How d'do." Varkofsky took Dan's hand in a ham-like fist.

Dan shuddered a bit. He decided that he'd better

leave. Varkofsky was obviously angry at something, and his father, usually so patient, looked as if he'd like to bite a piece out of Varkofsky's beard. Dan backed out and closed the door. Instantly the argument broke out anew.

"I offer five hundred thousand dollars in gold!" Varkofsky boomed.

Dan whistled. A lot of money, for something. Before he had the door entirely closed he heard his father's contemptuous answer.

"Chicken feed!" snorted Anson Perry. "You couldn't even get an option for any such sum. It's not for sale. Not any of it. You're wasting your time, Varkofsky. I could have told you that by mail and saved you the trip here from Vladivistok."

Dan rejoined Shorty outside. Something was in the wind. If this big Russian had travelled half-way around the world from his home in the chief seaport of Siberia, only to be turned down flat, he wouldn't feel very cheerful about it. But whatever it was, he knew his father was capable of handling it. Right now his main idea was to fly this new Electra. He and Shorty put on a pair of waders each, waded out into the surf and climbed up on the long, slim floats.

In the cabin Dan took his place in the pilot's seat, with Shorty opposite him in the co-pilot's position. He scanned the intricate array of dials, primed the two engine carburetors, and detailed Shorty to go out on the slim wing and remove the canvas engine covers. Everything was ready. Dan's two hands were busy with throttle and starter, but the powerful radial engines barked into life at his command.

As they warmed, Dan turned to Shorty with a suggestion.

"Say!" he shouted, over the roaring motors. "Your father is the chief navigator for my father, and has been for years. Didn't you ever learn aerial navigation from him?"

"Sure!" Shorty admitted. "That is—part of it. I can navigate all right by compass and dead reckoning, but I can't take a sextant shot. I can do it, I mean, but I haven't had spherical trigonometry yet in Long Island Tech. and the best I can do is work it out from the tables printed in the book."

"Well, that isn't enough," Dan told him. "Those are logarithm tables for marine navigators. You've got to know spherical trig. so you can work out your own angles, and work 'em fast. Your dad can shoot a star and have his position identified within three minutes."

"Yeah," nodded Shorty, somewhat embarrassed. "But he's thirty years older than I am. Give me a little time, won't you?"

"Well, there's your dad's sextant, right on the rack there. Try it while we're flying over the Sound," Dan suggested.

He put his hand on the two throttles, opened up, and pulled the wheel back as far as it would go. That threw a blast of air against the tail, and by skillful manipulation of one engine and the other, Dan turned the sleek ship about and headed for the blue water of the Sound. "Takes a while to break loose those floats," Dan remarked as the ship soared into the air.

"Yeah," Shorty shouted over the roar. "They're specially-made at the Farmingdale plant for this ship. First pair ever built for an Electra. They haven't got enough step on 'em."

"Oh, they'll work," said Dan. "What's that ship landing down there in our harbor?"

"What ship?" demanded Shorty.

Dan pointed downward out of the transport's control window. They saw a speedy-looking biplane of strange design, on huge wheels, come circling in for a landing. Instead of numbers, it bore a series of letters.

"Canadian registry," Dan explained. "Probably coming after that Russian. He's an unpleasant-looking fellow, isn't he?"

"He's a crook," Shorty exploded, wrathfully. "My dad told me about him two weeks ago, when he started to fly here. He says he is the biggest racketeer in the exploration profession. He makes a specialty of jumping claims, and working them with captive native labor. He claims to be civilized. Always makes a cash offer first. When that's rejected, he just moves in and takes over the whole claim."

"Huh!" scoffed Dan. "Fine chance he's got of pulling anything like that on any of my dad's claims."

"I hope you're right," Shorty said. "That plane's landed now."

"Forget about that plane," Dan advised. "Take your sextant. Get a shot at the sun, and see if you can work out your position. It will be good practice for you."

Dan put the vibrating ship on a straight and level

course, due east, heading toward Block Island, altitude five thousand. The Electra showed what she was made of by twisting her air-speed needle around the dial to 240—four miles a minute! It didn't seem possible to Dan. It didn't feel any different than any of the single-motor jobs he had been flying at Roosevelt Field. He scanned all his instruments to be sure that everything was working perfectly. At this speed any little thing might cause a sudden crack-up. But the Electra, he knew, had a record of a million miles or more on regular transport runs without a single crack-up.

Anson Perry had bought it to act as a sort of flagship for the rest of his flying exploration fleet. It had the necessary room for Arctic and Antarctic navigation with Bumstead sun compasses when the regular magnetic compasses pointed south; it had equipment for high-altitude aerial cameras and quick developing; a two-way radio installation for voice communication between ship and base, and a galley to cook food for the crew during the long over-water flights that are part of every large-scale expedition. Its cabin, which in other ships of this type would be filled with comfortable seats, was lined with sound-proof Celotex and fire-proof asbestos. It was entirely bare except for the special installation of camera mounts, radio panels and navigating table.

Dan idled the two roaring engines, banked in a wide circle and headed down. The flat surface of the Sound looked like concrete to him. If he misjudged this landing, it would feel like concrete, too. As he came swooping down with a sigh of flying

wires, he was easing back the wheel and letting the ship settle naturally on the choppy surface.

With a slight bump, the padded noses of the twin floats lifted up on the sloping ramp. Dan saw a red light flash on beside his face as he lowered the wheels, and with a burst of power from the motors he lifted the ship up the ramp and straight into the wide, dark expanse of the hangar.

"Not bad," Shorty complimented him.

"Only fair," Dan replied. "I shouldn't have bounced that way when I set her down. Hey, where's that biplane we saw landing here?"

"Gone," Shorty shrugged.

"I wanted to get a look at it," Dan went on. "Oh well—it means that confab in there is over, anyway. I guess dinner's ready. Come on in. Let's see what Suki's got cooked up for us this time."

"Dan!" barked Shorty, with surprise. "Somebody dropped a watch!"

"Sure enough," Dan agreed, stooping to pick it out of the grass. "It's still running. It's—say, Shorty! This is dad's watch!"

But Shorty wasn't hanging around to listen. He was legging it up the low slope toward the big house, and Dan overtook him in a dozen strides. There was fear in Dan's heart then, a sudden fear that he could not express. He didn't dare say what he was beginning to know in his own heart. He was afraid it might be true.

Flinging open the door to his father's study, he saw instantly that it was empty. Papers were strewn all over the floor. The desk chair had been over-

turned, and there were fresh scars on the dull walnut panelling of the walls.

"They've got him!" Dan shouted. "Varkofsky's got my father!"

"Phone the police," ordered Shorty.

"What's the use?" Dan argued. "They took him away in that biplane, and he's probably fifty miles from here by now. Where's he gone? Is there any clue to this gang's destination? Help me look, Shorty."

Frantically, Dan began a hasty search of the room. Anson Perry had put up a notable battle. There wasn't a single piece of furniture left intact in the room. Somebody had used a stiff-backed walnut side chair as a weapon, and brought it crashing down upon Mr. Perry's beautiful hand-carved walnut desk. Blood spots showed on the Persian rug. Drawers of the desk had been flung out and overturned; papers were piled in littered heaps all around the scene of battle.

"Well, he certainly put up a scrap, anyhow!" Shorty admitted.

Dan sat down in the midst of the wreckage and held his head in his hands. There was no one in the house at the time except his father, Varkofsky and Suki, the cook. Suki had gone, too.

Dan poked an inquisitive foot into the pile of torn papers. His foot struck something hard. He bent over to pick it up.

It was an automatic pistol, a big German Luger with a nine-shot capacity. Clamped to its ugly muzzle was a Maxim silencer, a many-ringed muffler

that would throttle down the roar of its shot to a sort of cough—something that would not be heard in any other part of the house.

Dan looked at it. He knew it was Varkofsky's. His father had never owned a Luger and such a thing as a Maxim silencer was unheard-of in the United States. Not even the underworld had them. They were made in Austria and each one was carefully concealed from public gaze.

Two shots were fired from it! Where had they gone? Into the body of his father? Had Varkofsky calmly pulled out this murderous weapon and taken careful aim at Anson Perry's heart?

Chapter II

VARKOFSKY LEADS THE CHASE

DAN PERRY sat down on the floor amid the wreckage. He was too stunned to move. The suddenness of it—the totally unexpected outcome of what he thought was just an unpleasant interview, left him momentarily dazed.

Dan didn't know just what he could do. He sat there on the floor aimlessly rubbing his head and staring at nothing. If he could only think. If he could snap out of this morbid state of mind. But the shock of it was a serious blow to him.

At length, he rose and slowly ascended the wide, carved-oak stairway to his own room directly above. He found himself beginning to come back to normal. He was in familiar territory again, where everything was in its place and the horrible scene below seemed many miles away. Across the room in an alcove stood the three upright racks of his short-wave transmitter, its chromium dials glowing in the twilight from the wide window overlooking the Sound.

It was a relief to sit down in his own leather chair and see the orderly array of meters, switches and control lights. He had built the set himself; he had worked many a ham operator all over the world from this narrow table beneath that wide window.

On the table was a large geographical globe in a brass mounting. Dan spun it around with his finger. It was a habit he had. He used to spin the globe, stop it at some point and then try to raise a short-wave amateur station at the point where his finger landed. He located that part of Long Island where his home lay. Then he began tracing a pattern with his finger toward Canada.

Instantly, Dan was alert and eager. He picked up a pencil and traced the logical route northward.

"Let's see," he said aloud. "Albany. Probably about there now!"

It was the work of a few seconds to throw the master switch and get his set on the air. He heard the small generator's whining note rising; he felt the power transformer warming behind its cage under the racks. His eyes were on the delicate, wavering needles of his meters, telling the story of warming tubes. He was impatient. But he had to wait until that final stage transmitter tube was thoroughly warm. Then he reached for his studio-type velocity microphone and turned up his main gain to give his voice a clear tone.

"Calling CQ!" he burst out, in a monotone. "Calling CQ! Calling CQ! Albany. Albany. Any operator at Albany. Are you there, W2AXD? Calling CQ. Calling W2AXD, Albany. W8KXO calling W2AXD. Come in!"

He pushed the microphone back and turned his antenna switch to the receiving set. He turned up the volume on the speaker. It crackled and sputtered for a few seconds and Dan turned the volume down

to get rid of it. His tuning dial was slowly circling back and forth.

"W2KLZ calling W8KXO!" somebody was repeating. "W2KLZ calling W8KXO. All right, Dan. Come in. W2KLZ standing by."

Dan took a relieved breath. A hit on his first try! It wasn't his usual contact in Albany, but it was another ham about his own age on the edge of town. Dan pulled the microphone back into position.

"That you, Bobby? You live out on the western edge of town, don't you? Near the airport? Well, keep contact. Take a look out the window and see if you can see a big biplane with some Canadian registry letters."

"I heard something going over a few minutes ago," the operator said. "Just a minute. I'll call the airport, and see if they got a look at it."

Dan waited, tense, for several minutes. His fists were tightly clenched as he sat at the radio table. He was breathing hard. It was a lead, anyway. It was his first clue. Possibly they'd seen it.

"Still there?" the Albany ham barked cheerfully.

"Go ahead," Dan assured him.

"Yes, they saw it. They thought it was going to land and go through a customs examination there. Every Canadian plane crossing the border has to go through the customs at the Albany airport. But this cuss just kept on going, so they got a report of his numbers anyhow in case there'd be some investigation of it. You know anything about it?"

"Do I?" Dan was shouting into the microphone so hard that the V.I. needle slammed clear across the

dial and up against the stop pin. "Do I know anything about it? Hurry, Bobby. Describe this ship. Which way did it go?"

"It's an all-metal Soviet Russian cabin biplane. Two big water-cooled motors mounted between the wings. Registry numbers were painted on the rear of the fuselage. Letters C-AVVX. Repeating. C-AVVX."

"Okay," Dan cut in. "Which way was she heading?"

"I don't know," the operator told him. "The airport said she was flying high, about 10,000 feet, and was slightly northwest as if she were going toward Toronto. She's a long-range cruiser; you can tell that by looking at her, they told me. Probably can go clear to Winnepeg if the skipper feels like it."

"That's it!" exulted Dan. "Winnepeg! Okay, and thanks, Bobby. Much obliged. W8KXO to W2KLZ. Signing off."

He pulled the master switch and ran out of the room. He shouldn't have done it; he knew better than to shut off a transmitter that way, but he didn't have time to do it one step at a time. Dan was halfway out of the house before he happened to think about himself, and ran back to his room again to throw a few things into a wide leather travelling bag. Then he raced at top speed down the gravel pathway toward the big hangar where the sleek Lockheed Electra stood ready and waiting.

He'd have to have help moving her out. Where was Shorty?

"Here I am," Shorty waved from the hangar door.

"I thought you'd find out something and come tearing down here. So I refuelled the ship and packed a lot of extra gas drums in the cabin. I've got some food packed up here, too. I'm all set. Where are we going?"

"Winnepeg!" roared Dan. "Help me pull her out."

Darkness blotted out the earth before they'd been in the air an hour. But Dan didn't care. Not in this ship. Beside him was a little tell-tale red signal light that kept winking on and off, on and off; somewhere he could hear a musical buzzer note, as high-pitched as a violin, that kept cadence with the light. As long as he heard it, he was riding the beam.

"Those confounded floats take thirty miles an hour off her speed," said Dan, breaking a long silence that had endured since they had left Long Island. "You can't tuck 'em up inside as you would the wheels."

Shorty nodded, without saying anything. But Dan wanted to talk.

"She feels sluggish," he said. "I can feel a change of balance. Shouldn't do that. Suppose you go back and see."

"How long have you noticed it?" Shorty asked him.

"Ever since we took off. It didn't act this way this afternoon."

"Probably one of those gas drums is loose," Shorty ventured.

He opened the cabin door and stepped down into the passageway. Dan corrected with his stabilizer

wheel for the change in balance, but there followed a sort of threshing sound in the cabin, a disturbance that shook the whole ship. Dan couldn't leave the controls, but he was trying his best to twist his neck around the door-frame to see what was going on. Shorty solved the mystery by re-appearing in the opening with a sheepish grin and a single statement.

"We've got company," he said. "Look who's stowed away aboard."

"Suki!" exclaimed Dan. "What made you do that?"

The slim little Japanese cook was bowing low and cracking his face in a prodigious grin that was full of white teeth. He bowed again.

"Excuse!" he apologized. "So sorry. Humble apologies. I just go down to hangar; look for honorable boss. I think mebbe inside. I go inside, take look-see. Not there. Oh! What to do? I rise to the occasion. Honorable boss gone; I look for him. I must find him."

"Yes, yes, go on," Dan encouraged him.

"No! Honorable boss not anywhere. Russian thug got him. I cannot permit this. I must save him. So I think, Dan knows! Honorable Mr. Dan find out. He must have help. So I go aboard and wait. So here I am."

"So what?" Dan prodded. He tried not to laugh. He knew that Suki was acting from the very best of motives. He, too, was determined to do whatever he could to help the "honorable boss." But by stowing away on board the transport he was slowing down the pursuit and endangering the two pursuers.

He was most decidedly in the way. He'd be an added responsibility, another man to feed. That reminded Dan of something.

"See if you can conjure up a little grub, Suki," Dan told him.

"Can do. Can do," Suki bowed again. "All ready. What'll you have?"

"That sounds like you've got everything on the menu!" Shorty put in. "Well, now, Suki, you can fix me a nice big steak out there on that electric grill, and some French-fried potatoes, and some fruit salad and some apple pie. Don't forget the cheese. And a glass of milk."

"No got," Suki interrupted.

"What? You mean to say you didn't bring any milk?"

"He didn't bring any of that food," Dan corrected him. "Where do you think you are—at the round table at the Algonquin?"

"I was afraid of that," mourned Shorty. "Well, Suki, let's hear it."

"Got tin can soup, tin can bean, also fine bean soup. In tin can too. Everything got tin can. Even moo juice."

"Say, now listen, Shorty," protested Dan, "I wish you'd stop teaching Suki slang. It's hard enough to understand him half the time now. That moo juice . . . did he get that from you?"

"What do you think I am? A cow?" shouted Shorty. "He got it out of a tin can. Well, cook me up something, Suki. Anything. Only hurry."

"Most sudden," Suki promised. "I hurry like skyrocket."

Dan wasn't in the mood just then to correct Suki's picturesque English. It was a hopeless job. Suki had been in the Perry family ever since Anson Perry had found him, half-dead, on a wrecked fishing sampan ten miles off Samokua Island in the Straits of Korea. Suki didn't look any older now than he had then. His skill as a cook had blossomed out until he had become a veritable genius of the pots and pans. But although everybody in the family had tried it, for years, nobody could teach Suki how to form a correct sentence.

The great transport droned high over the rolling farm lands of Michigan, over the rolling blue waves of Lake Michigan, and passed over Wold-Chamberlin Field, Minneapolis, at the precise moment Shorty had calculated. Heading due north, the musically-pitched beam indicator guided them through the night skies over the Canadian border and down to a safe landing at the Canadian Airways base at Winnepeg.

"Jumpin' Jehosophat!" exclaimed the night watchman. "Where'd you get them floats on an Electra?"

"Never mind that now," Dan cut him short, "I want eight hundred gallons of gas right away. Did you see a big all-metal Russian biplane pass over here tonight?"

"Sure did," the watchman replied, unreeling the long coiled hose from the fuel pumps. He handed it up to Shorty, who had climbed up on the wing and was reaching down to unfasten the filler cap on the wing tanks. The gurgle of rushing gasoline made him talk in a loud voice.

"Darndest-lookin' thing that ever flew in here!" he

shouted. "It took a thousand gallons, too. Had to send out fer more. Big guy with a long black beard down to here paid me off in gold English sovereigns. First gold money I've seen in a long time. Just left here 'bout a half hour ago."

"Which way?" Dan demanded.

"Northwest. Toward Edmonton, probably."

Dan sighed with relief. The last of the vast wing tanks was brimming full. Shorty screwed the caps on tight, and climbed in. Once again the two Wasp engines roared into life.

"That'll be four hundred dollars, bub!" shouted the watchman.

"Gosh!" breathed Shorty. "What'll we do now?"

Dan leaned out of the window and beckoned the watchman closer.

"Make out a bill," he said, "I'll sign it. Mail it to the Trust Department of the National City Bank of New York. They'll send you a check."

"What name?" persisted the watchman. Then he ran his gaze along the newly-painted words on the Electra's fuselage.

"Oh! Anson Perry, eh? That's good enough for me. Good luck."

He waved them onward. Dan lifted the big ship into the blue-black sky and set her on a compass course toward Edmonton, a thousand miles away.

"What kind of a gag is that?" Shorty thundered, in reproof. "You know we haven't got a dollar between us. The National City Bank probably never heard of Anson Perry."

"Oh, no?" countered Dan. "Well, they have. My father has a large account there, that is used for

just such things as this. They pay bills for him wherever he happens to be. If he's captured by Chinese bandits, for instance, they'll pay his ransom. I wish the bank could get him out of this jam."

"We'll tell your bearded Russian friend Varkofsky about it," said Shorty. "Maybe he'll take a check."

"You're full of bright ideas," Dan remarked. "If I ever get close enough to Varkofsky to hand him a check, I'll hand him something else."

"With what?" Shorty countered.

Dan was silent. Shorty had put his finger on the weakness of this impulsive dash after a vanished airplane. Suppose they did overtake Varkofsky? Suppose the figuring was correct, and the Electra's speed was so much superior to the Russian's biplane that they could catch him before he landed somewhere, what could they do?

They had a .45 Colt stowed away in the cabin, but Varkofsky probably had a complete arsenal aboard the biplane. Undoubtedly it was armored to protect them from just such attack. And no matter what sort of attack Dan could conceive, it wouldn't help his wounded father!

"Lights ahead!" came Shorty's voice. "Twin exhaust flames, too. Stand by, Dan. Here's your man. There's Varkofsky's plane!"

Dan looked. A mile or so ahead of them, flying cautiously along on their same course, loomed the sinister silhouette of a big biplane.

"It's Varkofsky," Dan admitted. "We're going to force him down."

Chapter III

ANGUS WANTS HIS MONEY

THERE was silence in the Electra's cabin. The unvarying roar of the two huge Wasps drummed monotonously into their ears. Dan's brain was working at top speed, creating and discarding one plan after another for beginning the attack on Varkofsky's plane. Shorty was busy with his flight chart, checking his position by time and compass course.

"Where are we now?" Dan inquired.

"About twenty miles northwest of Saskatoon. He seems to have left the Edmondton airway and struck out in a new direction, nearly north."

"Where's he going?" Dan asked.

"Let's trail him and find out," Shorty replied.

Northward, all night long, the Electra pursued the giant biplane. It was nearly dawn before Varkofsky made the first move to land. There was a faint, misty gray on the eastern horizon, but it would be an hour before sunrise. Shorty nudged Dan violently and pointed below.

The big all-metal biplane was circling, and in self-protection Dan opened the two throttles and sent the Electra skyward to twelve thousand feet. They watched carefully as their enemy made a wide circle

around the eastern shore of a gigantic lake that stretched on and on northward below the horizon. It looked as large as Lake Michigan to them.

Dan watched alertly as Varkofsky came down in a tighter circle and skimmed low over a hilly island, some short distance from shore. The island was only a quarter-mile or so from the mainland at its closest point, but it was a sizeable piece of land, perhaps five miles long and two or three miles wide. It showed a black, irregular shoreline against the silver gray of the lake. Many little bays and inlets dotted the island's shores.

"He hasn't got any floats," Dan told Shorty. "If he lands, he'll have to use his wheels. Do you suppose there's a field on the island?"

"Must be," Shorty rejoined.

"Look!" Dan shouted, pointing downward. "He isn't landing. He's dropping a little packet of something with a parachute. Look at the lights come on. The whole place is being lighted up!"

One building after another stood forth in harsh electric illumination. Runway lights flashed green on a long, level flying field deep in the island's interior.

"Well, I'll be a sardine!" Shorty burst out. "What do you make of that, Dan?"

"Varkofsky knows we're trailing him, I suppose," Dan responded. "He had intended to land there, and they were waiting for him. But instead, he drops something and heads away. He didn't want to have us watch what he did when he landed. I judge from that, Shorty, that my father is still alive and they're

taking him somewhere else. The secret of that island will have to wait until I find out where they're going."

"Very sensible," Shorty commented. "Very sensible indeed. Well, I have a hunch it won't be long now. It can't be long now. We're right up on the Arctic Circle!"

"What?" roared Dan.

"Yes," Shorty repeated, and passed over his flight chart. "This is where we are. This is Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories of Canada. The Arctic Circle passes through it a little north of where that island is."

"Great guns!" Dan exploded. "The Arctic Circle! Why, I didn't think we'd come that far. That's better than three thousand miles in fourteen hours. It couldn't be possible."

"Look at your airspeed meter," Shorty said.

Dan's eyes saw the needle pointing a little bit beyond 220.

"And it isn't wide open, either," Shorty reminded him.

"I see something else," Dan pointed out. "Our compass course shows that Varkofsky is heading a little south of west, probably hitting for the open water off Alaska to stage the finish fight with us. He doesn't want us to crash any place where a Mountie can find the wreckage and start an investigation. So, don't let him lure you out to sea, Dan."

"Don't worry," Dan promised, "he won't crash us."

"This is far enough," pleaded Shorty. "You don't know what sort of capacity that ship has. He may be planning on flying straight across to Siberia nonstop. And I tell you again, Dan, if he gets us out of sight of land he'll mow us down with a machine-gun."

Dan was breathing fast, his pulse pounding. He knew Shorty was right. He knew it was certain death to chase that big biplane any farther out over the open ocean.

They'd be helpless out there. They couldn't fight back because they had no guns and no protection. This ship wasn't armored; wasn't designed for stunting or aerial combat.

And yet Dan wouldn't give up. He was thinking of his father, probably badly wounded and lying trussed up on the metal floor of that vibrating cabin, being taken somewhere—nobody knew where. Nobody but Varkofsky! And behind him, Dan Perry and his pal Shorty were going right into a trap unless they fled for their own lives while there was time.

"I won't give up!" Dan yelled to Shorty. "I won't let them have him. I'll ram that biplane and sink it if I have to! I'll dive down on it!" I'll——"

"Better let me off here, then," Shorty came back. "I don't like to gargle salt water. And I can't swim ashore in this icy ocean, either."

Dan was pounding his fist against the compartment window, biting his lips; beads of ice-cold moisture appeared on his tanned face. His father! A chase of more than three thousand miles—then this!

"There's a ship out there," he pointed. "I'll crash him right there and get picked up. That'll work. It's got to work."

"You'd better circle around a while," Shorty suggested. "It looks as if Varkofsky is going to land there himself."

"On those wheels?" Dan roared. "Is he crazy?"

"He's got an inflated flotation gear. Look at that, will you?"

Compressed air was inflating a big, balloon-like covering under the lower wing. The biplane's wheels were being cranked up into the hull of the cabin, and the cabin itself, the boys saw, was a seaplane hull. Varkofsky came down to a skimming landing on the rising swells, and then as his momentum dwindled this inflated float stopped him short. The craft bobbed about for a few minutes on the swells, while the long white cargo ship approached. A long boom was lowered overside, a crane hook was seen bobbing and swinging as the big ship swung about to provide a lee shelter, and a man stuck his head out of the biplane's cabin roof and clutched the hook. He fitted it into a ring. Then, as easily as a college rowing crew lifting their shell from the river, the powerful winches on the ship's deck lifted the plane bodily off the water, swung it inboard and lowered it gently to the deck.

"Let's get out of here," Shorty suggested. "Men who can figure out inventions like that are too smart for us."

"Oh, are they? If that was your father in that cabin you wouldn't give up."

"I probably would never have started," Shorty came back. "Nobody wants my dad badly enough to yank him half-way around the world this way."

"I—I'll have to go back, I guess," Dan admitted. "I can't get anywhere against a ship at sea. I'll put in at Seward, Alaska, and see if I can get the Coast Guard cutter to go out and pull the ship in."

"They'll never find it," Shorty shook his head. "If you lose it now, it's gone. Well, thanks for the buggy ride, Dan. Let's see if you can cash another of those magic I.O.U.'s on the bank, down yonder at Seward. Then we'll gas up and go on home, after I've slept a while. Ho-hum."

But Dan was still circling stubbornly around the ship, refusing to admit he was licked. He'd have to figure out something else.

Probably because there was nothing else to do, he throttled down and began a long glide toward the Alaskan coast. Below him, some five or six miles from the big white ship, was an old fishing lugger, bobbing and heaving into the heavy swells, headed out to sea.

It was only a mile from shore when Dan began his glide. When the skipper saw that the great, sleek Electra was heading for the surface and the protected inlet he had just left, he turned the craft about and began following.

Dan brought the Electra down on the calm water of the inlet, allowed it to run along the surface for some minutes, then turned and headed for a narrow strip of beach near a thick-wooded hill. Shorty was the first to open the cabin door and jump down into

the sand. Suki followed, his arms full of baggage and canned food cases. He carried these down to the water's edge and sat down on one of the cases patiently.

"Morning already," he remarked. "What place is this, please? I sleep fine back there on soft pillow. Some sharp edge of tin can make me have bad dream. I dream honorable Dan take me back to Japan."

"You're not far off, at that," Shorty told him. "We're darned near there. This is the coast of Alaska. You're three thousand miles from home, in either direction. It's as far to Perry Anchorage as it is to Yokohama."

"So?" echoed Suki, his slanted eyes wide with astonishment.

Dan clambered out of the cabin and locked the door.

"She's all shut off and everything's tight," he said. "Suki, let's take all this stuff down to the beach and see if we can make a deal with that skipper. I hear his little engine putt-putting into the inlet."

"Yeah," nodded Shorty. "So do I. And you want to stop a big white cargo ship far out at sea with that."

"Good boat," Suki put in, watching it. "Lots better from Samokua Island sampan. Suki know. Mebbe go to Japan in that boat."

"Not me," protested Shorty. "Not in any fishing boat."

"I don't know, at that," Dan said to himself, as the awkward old lugger approached. "As it gets closer, it gets bigger. Sturdily-built old scow. It must be

forty or fifty feet long; good dry cabin in her——"

"Hello-o-o-o!" came a raucous hail from aboard the lugger. "What in thunderation ye doin' here?"

Dan gestured the skipper to come in as close to shore as he could.

"I need some help," he said. "I've got to get out there and overhaul that white cargo ship that is offshore now. It's a big one. I didn't get the name. But my father is a prisoner aboard, and badly wounded."

"Waal now," the skipper remarked, leaning over the rail, "when did all this happen?"

"Yesterday. A man named Varkofsky kidnapped my father, and I've flown all this way trying to get some help."

"How'd he get aboard the ship?" the skipper demanded.

"Varkofsky shot him, in our house near New York City. He carried him aboard a big all-metal biplane, and flew all the way up here until he sighted that ship, and then he landed alongside——"

"Now wait a mite, son," counselled the skipper. "I thought you said it was an airplane. How could it land alongside a ship at sea unless it had floats? Huh? Answer me that."

"It had a cabin shaped like a seaplane hull, and a retractable gear. When it landed, it tucked its wheels up inside its cabin, and came down. Then it inflated a big rubber raft under the lower wing, to keep it from capsizing until the ship got there. They put a hook over the side and pulled it aboard with a boom and a winch."

"H'mmmm. You say you saw all this happen?" the skipper said.

"Yes, and so did I," Shorty piped up. "They actually did it."

"Waal, by thunder," the skipper ejaculated. "Mebbe they did."

"Now," continued Dan, "my father's aboard that ship. There's no telling what they'll do to him. I'll probably never see him alive again. Can't you do something? Can't you take us out there and try to follow it until we can get some help? Please! It's life and death!"

The skipper sat down and pondered. Once or twice he looked searchingly at the pair, and with open suspicion at Suki and the piled-up bags and crates on the beach. He was a man of fifty, perhaps; haggard-looking, unshaven, clothed in rather dirty corduroys and an old "sourdough" checked shirt. He was wearing a heavy, thick woolen cap.

The lugger was a good fifty feet at the water line, immaculately-scrubbed, freshly-painted. Its high prow was the chief cause of its awkward appearance, but aft of the stubby mast it sloped gracefully to a low, slender stern with two big exhaust ports for its stuttering old engine.

On the mast was a cage-type radio aerial. It showed that the craft carried a transmitter, and probably a good one, judging from the size and shape of the insulators protecting it from its guy lines. Dan redoubled his plea. He used every argument he could think of, and as he warmed to his topic, he thought of some new pleadings that he had never

thought of before. If he could trail that big ship, and raise the Navy base in the Aleutians, and get some help——

"It's like this," the skipper said. "I'm a fisherman. I got to make a living. My wife lives yonder in that cabin, and if I don't take home a good catch of fish tonight, she'll say: 'Angus, ye loafin', lazy, good-for-nothin'——"

"I'll pay you!" Dan volunteered, recklessly.

"Well, I'll make ye a price. Fifty dollars."

"That siuts me," Dan agreed. "Hop in, Shorty. Suki, you stay here and guard the plane and the supplies until we get back."

"Wait a minute, there, son," Angus interrupted. "Let's see the color of yore money."

Hastily Dan explained about the bank, in New York, told how the bank would send him a check upon receipt of Angus's bill. But Angus poled the craft farther out into the inlet, and held up a firm hand.

"No ye don't!" he barked. "I don't know nothin' about no bank. I said fifty bucks. That means cash. Gold or greenbacks. And I don't take no I.O.U.'s, neither."

Dan dropped his eager hands to his sides and slumped down on the sand. Shorty sat down beside, and propped against him. They were silent. That magic phrase about the bank wouldn't work. This fisherman had never heard of it. He demanded cash in advance. And cash was the one thing that the boys didn't have and couldn't get.

A faint wisp of black smoke clung to the horizon.

That was the big white cargo ship, out of sight, now. With every passing minute it was steaming closer and closer to Siberia, where even if Anson Perry survived he never would be heard from.

Dan sat there and looked down at the sand. To have come so far, and then lose out!

Angus, after a moment, disgustedly started his motor again and headed the craft's high prow toward the mouth of the inlet.

Chapter IV

A VERY STRANGE FISHING BOAT

THE fishing lugger had gotten under way and was chugging placidly toward the open sea when Dan made his last desperate appeal.

"Come back!" he cried.

"What you got in yore head now?" demanded Angus.

"I've got a movie camera here," Dan shouted. "It's complete with three lenses, including a telephoto. Takes 16 millimeter film. That telephoto lens is worth a hundred dollars alone. The whole outfit will run around six or seven hundred. I'll put it up as security. When we get back I'll fly you to Seward and cash a check at the bank. Then you can have your cash."

Angus shut off the engine, and tossed out an anchor. He pulled in on a line made fast to the lugger's stern and climbed into a small rowboat that was patiently towed along behind it. In a few rapid strokes he made the shore and drove it hard into the sand of the beach. Then he turned to Dan questioningly.

"Let's see it," he said, holding out a horny palm.

Dan nodded to Suki, who opened a brown leather kit bag and fished around inside. He trotted down

to the water's edge holding a thick leather case, with a carrying strap and a secure lock. Dan passed it over to Angus for inspection.

"I always wanted one of these," he said, plaintively. "I wish I could afford it. Yep, I'll bet that there outfit set yore father back plenty o' dollars. Let's see how it goes back in the case."

Dan slipped it into the case and snapped the lock shut.

"Wait a mite!" Angus barked. "Whose name is that on there?"

Dan's name, DAN PERRY, was stamped on the leather case in small gold letters. It was the first time Angus had seen it.

"It's mine," Dan said. "I'm Dan Perry."

"Dan?" echoed old Angus. "Is your father—he ain't—Anson?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"Know him? Holy socks, who don't know him up in these latitudes? Why, yore dad got me my job. And you say he's on that there ship? Get in, the both o'you. Hurry up. Leave that heathen Chinee on the beach. We'll pick him up when we get back."

Somewhat surprised, but pleased that everybody seemed to know his father, Dan took his place in the bow. Shorty weighted down the stern. Angus sat on the narrow thwart and pulled like a madman for the lugger. Once alongside, he commanded the boys to help him lift the rowboat out of the water and stow it in a cradle upside down amidships. Then he

started the engine, and began putt-putting out toward the open sea.

"Great snakes," protested Shorty. "Is this as fast as this old tub will go? It doesn't seem as if we're moving at all."

"Be patient, son, be patient," Angus advised.

At length they cleared the bar at the mouth of the inlet and began dipping and bobbing in the offshore swells. Dan was sitting on the edge of the bench across the stern, straining his eyes to pick up a trace of that smoke on the horizon. Shorty had fallen asleep, sprawled at full length on a padded leather cushion.

Dan, however, paid Angus the courtesy of staying awake and listening to his slow, lazy drawl. Angus interrupted himself frequently to aim a brown stream of tobacco juice over the side, and carefully stroke his droopy walrus mustache with his left hand, first on one side, and then on the other.

Dan was feeling drowsy himself but suddenly something Angus said snapped him wide awake.

"Huh?" he grunted, sleepily.

"I said I've been itchin' to get a crack at that there white cargo ship since she first appeared in these waters," Angus repeated. "She's the curse of Alaska."

"How do you mean?" Dan queried.

"She's a modern pirate, Dan. I know plenty about this man Varkofsky you told me about. That's just the way he works. That's his freight ship, the one he transports the ore in."

"What ore?" Dan asked.

"Well, dang my buntline," Angus snapped, irritated. "Yore dad didn't tell you anything, did he?"

"Not about this. I never asked him. I don't like to be butting into secrets. Whatever this arrangement is between my father and Varkofsky, I certainly didn't feel that it was any of my business."

"No, I suppose not," Angus agreed. "I suppose not. But it is now, if yore this far in it. Varkofsky just jumped a claim of yore dad's on Pearson's Island, in Great Bear Lake. Did you know that?"

"No. We flew over there last night, but Varkofsky didn't land."

"Certainly not. He didn't want you boys to land there right behind him. But he tried to buy it off'n Anson, I reckon, and got turned down. Then he just snatched the man up and headed for this ship. With yore dad out of the way, y'see, there's nobody to complain to the Law up there and put him off. So Varkofsky's a few million dollars richer."

"What is it," Dan persisted. "A gold claim?"

"Nope," Angus told him. "It's pitchblende. That's a blackish, porous ore that is the only commercial source of radium, this stuff they use in hospitals to treat cancer. Well, sir, that there island is the greatest deposit of pitchblende in the world, and yore dad located it on his last expedition. It belongs to him. But not if he can't get it back from this Russian devil. Radium is worth two million dollars an ounce."

"Two million dollars an ounce?" echoed Dan, incredulously.

"Yep. Russian hospitals pay more for it. So you see why Varkofsky is so set on puttin' yore dad out o' business."

Dan sat back against the cushions and gasped. No wonder Varkofsky had the plans of this kidnapping well laid in advance. No wonder he hadn't landed on the island the night before. That would be a dead giveaway, and if the boys had managed to get away again, they'd spread the alarm and the claim-jumping Russians would be rounded up by the Mounties.

"A commercial explorer like yore dad," Angus was drawling on, "is different than a scientific explorer like Admiral Byrd. Anson Perry always went looking for something he could sell. He discovered a diamond deposit in the Matto Grosso jungles of Brazil. That gave him his start. Then he came into the Arctic. He located gold veins; copper, all sorts of minerals. After that he made a fortune in the seal-fisheries. That's where he got me this job."

"I thought you were a fisherman," Dan said.

"Shore. Shore. I am." But Angus grinned through his whiskers.

"But——"

"You'll see. I just want you to get this straight. Don't get impatient. The fur-bearing seals have a natural route they follow. Yore dad figured that out, years ago and discovered the seal island in the Pribilof group up in the Bering Sea where thousands of 'em breed. But Varkofsky tried to grab that, with his same tactics. He moved in there, and yore dad

organized a regular navy and drove him off. Then he hired some fellers like me. We're supposed to be fishermen. But we're really fishing for crooks like Varkofsky—pirates, claim-jumpers, who think because this seal-fishing monopoly is up here in the Arctic that nobody's around to guard them thousands of fur seals."

Dan was standing up and pacing the narrow cockpit space.

"Well, what kind of a fight can you put up with this old tub?"

"I'd say a pretty fair one, son. A pretty fair one. Like everything yore dad does, there's more to this here craft than meets the eye."

"But the lines of this old hooker," Dan protested. "That high prow, sticking up there like a cliff. You can't——"

"Oh, no?" Angus growled. "Well, you watch. I just been waitin' to get out of sight of shore, and out of hearin'. Hang on!"

He slid back a concealed panel in the wainscoting near the steering wheel. Inside was an ignition switch, and a throttle lever with a large rubber knob. Angus calmly flipped the switch, and gave the lever a slow push forward. Slowly he turned to Dan and grinned.

There was a growl somewhere below, a growl that rose swiftly to a bone-stirring roar. The awkward-looking lugger rose up out of the water and went pounding over the choppy swell like a sleek speedboat. The sting of spray peppered Dan's face. The blast of air nearly knocked him sprawling. Angus

was watching a dial in his little secret compartment, and pointed it out to Dan.

It was a speedometer. The needle was slowly passing the figure 40, edging around toward 50. It hung there, but staunchly fought a little farther. The motor's roar was rising into a scream. Angus' old corduroy clothes flapped around his sparse frame, but he clung to the wheel with both hands and opened the throttle even wider.

"Whoopee!" yelled Angus. "She'll do sixty! Hang on!"

The lurching craft was splitting the water like a destroyer. She bumped from crest to crest of the waves, sometimes entirely out of the water, sometimes hitting a swell head-on with a jar that nearly upset both of them. Looking at the white wake, Dan could see it stretched back of them as straight as a string for a mile. It was like riding a streamlined train over the sea.

The constant bump-bump at length woke Shorty up and tossed him on the floor with a thud. He scrambled up, his wide eyes startled as a sleepwalker's who suddenly awakes to find himself on the coping of a skyscraper.

"Great sufferin' catfish!" he exclaimed. "What is this? Where am I? On a rocket? What happened?"

The whistling wind flattened him out again, but he struggled to his feet and crouched in the shelter of the low cabin.

"Can't you go any faster than this?" Angus mocked, gleefully.

"What have you got down there—a locomotive engine?" Shorty demanded.

"Naw," Angus shouted. "It's a fifteen-hundred-horse-power Duesenberg racing engine. It has eighteen cylinders and it cost a lot of money."

"I should think so," Dan agreed. "You work on it yourself?"

"Who—me?" Angus shouted. "Naw. I don't know beans about them things. A feller from Seward comes down and fixes it every so often."

"Well, what's that switch for?"

"That? Well, that throws her over on dual ignition. When you're travellin' like this you use two sets of plugs. See?"

"It's just like one of those Gold Cup motors," Dan barked into Shorty's ear. "Like the ones we used to see at the races."

"You'd never think it to look at this tub," Shorty remarked.

"Sure. That's why Angus doesn't say anything about it to strangers."

"Is he running liquor or something?" Shorty demanded.

"No—he's a guard employed by the seal-fishing monopoly to keep outlaw boats away from the seal islands up around here," Dan told him.

"I wonder if he can do anything about Varkofsky?" Shorty asked.

"He says he can," Dan replied.

"There she is on the horizon. There's the ship!" Shorty shouted.

"Hold the wheel," Angus roared at Dan. "But don't slow down."

Dan gripped the thick spokes of the wheel as Angus disappeared into the small cabin. Both boys heard a generator whir into life, and presently Angus' rasping voice was barking into the radio microphone:

"Calling the S. S. Nikolsk. Calling the Nikolsk. Come in."

"Nikolsk standing by," came a guttural voice, thick with accent. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'll give you half an hour to stop and transfer Anson Perry to this vessel. Thirty minutes. If you don't—I'll sink you."

"Haw," came the voice. "Threatening us, eh? With that tub?"

"Thirty minutes, I said," Angus repeated, "Starting from now."

"Stand by," the operator commanded. Angus peered out of the cabin and winked at Dan. In a few moments another voice was heard on the little set's speaker. It was a deeper, booming bass. It was arrogant and defiant. It was cruel. It was Varkofsky himself.

"Whoever you are," he boomed out, "you're on the high seas now. If you think you're able to sink us, try it. I'm warning you."

There was a click as Varkofsky indignantly snapped off the ship's microphone. Angus switched off his own set and came back to the wheel.

"All right," he said. "I've got her. You kids get

down in the cabin where you won't get hurt. He'll start shelling us in a minute. I don't want to get too close."

Dan and Shorty obediently hurried down the narrow companionway into the dark cabin. But immediately they came back up the steps again as far as they could without exposing their heads. Shorty spoke.

"What do you suppose he intends to do?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Darned if I know," Dan shrugged. "But he wouldn't challenge that big ship unless he had some idea or other. I don't think he intends to lie off here and take a shelling from that ship without replying to it with something. But I don't see any guns around here, do you?"

"No," Shorty replied. "It's just a bluff."

"I hope not," Dan told him. "Bluff doesn't work with Varkofsky."

Whee-ee-ee! Crash! A screaming shell struck with the force of a bomb a few yards off the port quarter, showering the decks with cold salt water. The boys saw a geyser of water rise up some ten or twelve feet.

Angus was zig-zagging, but the gun spoke again and again.

Shorty was terrified. Dan gripped him and motioned to lie quietly.

"Dan!" Angus roared. "Get up forward in the cabin there and give that lever a yank. That brass lever in the forward bulkhead."

Dan hurried forward and gave the lever a mighty pull.

Another shell exploded near them. The boys thought the whole forward superstructure was coming down around their ears. Sunlight streamed into portholes in the cabin that had been covered up to that time. The ship trembled, and Angus guffawed loudly from his post at the wheel.

"Now," he screamed, "now, you Bolshevik pirate, let's see you get tough. I've got you, Varkofsky. I've got you dead to rights. Dan! Get forward there and man that gun. I'll show them some shooting."

Dan slid back a panel in the forward bulkhead and stepped out into the sunlight. Where the high, awkward prow of the fishing boat had been, there was now a well-oiled three-inch naval gun, securely fastened to the steel deck plates. A hand-cranked conveyor loaded with steel-nosed shells came up through an opening. The gun was protected by a wide armored steel shield, behind which a gunner could work in safety, secure even from machine-gun bullets.

Shorty stood beside him and gasped. Dan looked lovingly at that gun. He petted it. He motioned to Shorty to crank up a shell on the conveyor.

"Well, by the ghost of Admiral Dewey," Shorty breathed. "This is the strangest fishing boat I ever saw."

Chapter V

VARKOFSKY'S THREAT

THAT moment was the high point of Dan's life. Never had he exulted in the pure thrill of savage combat that the feel of this big, cold naval gun gave him. Never before had Dan Perry opened his mouth and screamed defiance at anybody the way he was screaming now at Varkofsky.

Another shell dropped close beside the lugger, exploding with a crash that sent a wall of water cascading over the pair at the long gun. Dan grabbed up a shell from Shorty's conveyor and shoved it home. He twirled the breech block, closed and locked it.

"How do you aim this thing?" Shorty demanded.

"We don't have to figure range and elevation," Dan shouted. "You can aim it like a rifle. It's point-blank range. It's right ahead of you. Stand clear."

Shorty held his ears. Dan gave the lanyard a quick jerk.

Boom!

The whole forward end of the craft seemed to rise up and sink down again. The long gun, some eight feet of steel, came shooting back into the recoil chamber with a prodigious jerk, and slowly assumed its normal position again. White smoke was

seeping out of the breech as Dan twirled the breech block crank.

Shorty ejected the hot shell-case, and it fell with a hollow clang on the steel deck. Then Dan took up a long-handled brush and swabbed out the hot barrel, freeing it from particles of powder and gas fumes. The gun was ready to load again.

"Where did that shot go?" Dan shouted at Angus.

"Search me," Angus retorted. "I think it went right over. That gun has an effective range of twelve miles, and in order to hit that there ship you gotta aim at the water-line. Duck your heads!"

Crash!

"Direct hit for them fellers on my mast," lamented Angus. "Look at it. That shot carried away the whole thing, yard-arm and all. There goes my radio. If they sink us we can't holler fer help now."

If they sink us! A casual remark on Angus' lips, but it brought cold terror to the boys huddled under the steel gun shield forward. The big ship was peppering away at them with its one-pounder, sending a steady stream of whistling shells bursting around their ears. But Angus was dodging and looping and turning figure 8's, swishing the craft this way and that, keeping just on the edge of the one-pounder's range and yet well within the huge naval gun's reach to score on the big ship.

"Now listen," Dan barked, turning in irritation to Shorty. "We haven't got the training of the regular Navy gun crews, but by the pink-toed prophet we're going to hit that ship. We've got to do it."

"If they don't sink us first," Shorty amended.

"Bring up another shell," Dan commanded.

A moment later, Shorty and Dan were thrown to the deck like stuffed dummies by the force of another explosion. Dan's shoulder hurt and swift twinges of pain shot through his body. He had come down on the steel deck on his shoulder. Shorty was picking himself up and huddling close to the armored steel shield for protection.

"Wh-what happened?" groaned Shorty.

"We took one on this steel shield, that's all," Dan told him. "If those things were armor-piercing and could go through it, where'd we be now? Get up on your feet and stand clear."

Boom! The lugger's gun spoke deafeningly.

They opened the breech-block and let out the white smoke before they dared look and see if they'd scored a hit. Their shell had gone whistling through the big ship's boat deck, carrying away some davits and exploding in a life-boat. This boat had been carrying a small gasoline engine, and the explosion had blown the engine right through the funnel, taking the whistle with it.

"You see the difference between a one-pounder and a naval gun?" Dan pointed out. "It won't take many of these."

"Why can't we get her down?" Shorty yelled.

"Motion of the boat," Dan told him. "She was on an upswell and had her nose pointed up when we shot that one."

"Well, let's do better next time." Shorty scolded.

They reloaded.

"Ready!" Dan barked.

A terrific geyser of water towered skyward just ahead of the big ship as the naval gun went off again.

"Missed!" stormed Dan.

"Wait a minute, boys," Angus shouted. "I'm going to get out of here. The're launching a motor cruiser with some machine guns."

He opened the big engine and once more the roar of the mammoth eighteen-cylinder power plant echoed in their ears. Dan couldn't figure why Angus would be afraid of machine guns. One shot from this big gun would blow that motor cruiser sky-high. But when Angus slowed, a few miles away, he clambered forward around the battened-down row-boat and took over the gun himself.

"Can't take that kind of a chance," he said. "If you boys aimed at that cruiser and missed, which you would've, they'd be down on you and blast you full of lead before you could reload again. Shorty, you stay here and help me. Dan, you take the wheel."

They changed places accordingly, with Dan as mystified as ever.

"Now," breathed Angus, "I'll show you some fancy shootin'."

Dan headed the craft's nose toward the onrushing motor cruiser, its armored cabin sprouting with machine-gun muzzles. Angus didn't seem to be afraid of it. He twirled his two cranks back and forth with his eye against the rubber eye-piece of the sighting tube until he was satisfied. He rammed home a shell, locked the breech, took the lanyard in one hand and shoved Shorty down the hatchway

with the other. He followed him inside, and locked the armored cabin door.

Aft, Dan noticed that Angus was knotting a long piece of cord on the end of the lanyard.

"Keep her nose right on that cruiser," Angus shouted.

Dan nodded. The cruiser was throwing up twin arcs of spray and cutting the water like a knife. A few hundred yards away, two machine guns in its cabin erupted with a stuttering, staccato chant. Slugs clattered like hailstones against the armored sides of the craft. Bullets whistled over Dan's head but he clung to the wheel, cautiously keeping the craft's nose lined up on the onrushing cruiser. They could hear its motors now. They could hear the hysterical chattering of those guns as they tried to batter a hole in the craft's steel-armored sides.

"Keep her right there, Dan," Angus warned.

Boom!

Dan clung to the wheel to keep the craft from veering off. The sky was full of white water . . . . spray . . . . wreckage! There wasn't any cruiser there any more. Bits of smashed timbers were falling all around them. The gray-blue swells were boiling with bubbles. A great wave began circling outward from the spot where the bubbles were breaking.

"Direct hit!" exulted Angus. "Son, that's gunnery. But I wouldn't stay on the deck and do that. Those machine-gun slugs will find their way into any kind of a crack. They'd kill you, standing there working your gun. All right, Shorty—on deck. More shells. The big baby this time."

"Are—are you going to sink her?" breathed Shorty, horrified. "All those men—they'll be trapped just like the crew of the cruiser——"

"I warned 'em," snapped Angus. "I gave 'em a chance. They wouldn't take it. This is the end of that pirate Russian."

He was lining up his sights squarely on the big freighter's amidships waterline. He was yelling to Shorty to ram that shell in; to lock the breech. Dan suddenly began to tremble. His father!

"Remember my father's on board!" he shouted.

"Plumb forgot that," Angus said, snapping his fingers in surprise. "All right, I'll sink her by the head. They can lock their 'tween-decks bulkheads and she'll float that way for hours. Plenty of time to get your dad off."

Dan was almost too excited to hold the wheel. He was afraid.

Boom!

"Another shell! Quick!" yelled Angus.

Boom! Two direct hits.

Dan saw a monstrous, gaping hole on the waterline up forward under the well-deck. He saw steel plates twisted like tinfoil; the shattered ribs of the doomed vessel lying exposed like a skeleton. Boats were being frantically lowered from the high davits. Men were jumping hysterically into the sea. As Dan looked he could see the ship wallowing helplessly, sinking by the head, its fo'c'sle awash and its stern high out of the water, propellers and rudder exposed.

"I'll take the wheel now," Angus said. "Let me do the talkin'."

Again the powerful engines of Angus' craft roared. He swung about a few hundred yards off the doomed freighter's port bow, and walked arrogantly forward along his littered deck to the hot gun on the bow.

"Well?" he yelled, cupping his hands. "Got enough, or do you want me to send you to the bottom?"

"Don't!" screamed the panic-stricken members of the crew. "Don't do that! We're sinking. Are you going to machine-gun our lifeboats too?"

"Nope," Angus replied. "I'm not Varkofsky. I'm supposed to be civilized. But unless I get Anson Perry here in five minutes, not a single one o' you will ever reach shore alive."

"He's coming," pleaded a deck officer. "We're sending you Varkofsky too. You can have him. Take both of 'em."

"Well, if you insist," Angus replied. "But I'd rather see him go down with his ship."

The ship's longboat was sliding down the sloping side with a screech of unoiled blocks. It took the water, the crew shipped their oars and began pulling away toward Angus and his threatening gun. As it came alongside, Dan rushed forward. He could see a blanketed form lying in the stern propped against the knees of the helmsman. He could see a white-faced invalid, coughing feebly. His father! Alive!

Dan also saw clearly the swarthy features of the bearded Russian, Varkofsky, sitting quietly on the opposite side. As the boat drew alongside Varkofsky made the first move to come aboard. But Angus

whipped out a pistol and pointed it suggestively at the Russian's head.

"No you don't," he said. "We're going to have a little talk, first. You stay where you are, Varkofsky. All right, men, lift Mr. Perry up and hand him over to us. Lively, now!"

"Hello, Dan," breathed Mr. Perry, trying to smile.

"Dad!" sighed Dan. He couldn't say anything more. Tenderly he helped lift the limp burden and carry it below to the clean bunk in the cabin. Shorty was arranging pillows and straightening the blankets.

"Thanks," said Mr. Perry. "I'm all right now. Nice work, Angus. How'd you boys happen to find Angus, anyhow?"

"We'll tell you about it on the way back," Dan said. "In the meantime, dad, what'll we do with Varkofsky?"

"Oh, let him come aboard, I suppose," Mr. Perry coughed, feebly. "I'll take him back to Edmondton for trial. But the rest of these men have been through enough for one day. Send 'em back to their ship."

"But—but it's sinking!" protested Shorty.

"No, it isn't," Mr. Perry said. "They can rig a temporary bulkhead over that gash with boards, and caulk 'em. Their pumps will keep them afloat until they can dry-dock her at Vladivistok. I know what it means to be put adrift in lifeboats in these latitudes. Let 'em go."

Angus clambered up to the deck and shouted at the boat crew.

"Bring that big bag o' wind aboard," he barked.

Varkofsky was rudely shoved aboard by the boat crew, which thereupon pushed off and began pulling back to the ship.

"Wait a minute, boys," Varkofsky ordered. They rested on their oars.

"Now, here's my proposition," Varkofsky boomed. "I know you've got me. But I can make things easy for you, or tough. You choose. You let me go, and I'll clear out of Radium Island in Great Bear Lake."

"You'll clear out anyhow, you crook," Anson Perry snapped.

"Yes? Well, maybe and maybe not. Maybe you can't make me give up that pitchblende working. Maybe if I choose to stand trial I can prove that I had just as much right to it as you have."

"Nonsense," Mr. Perry remarked, wearily.

"Sounds like you," Angus sneered. "Let's stop arguing, Anson. I'll chain him up in the forepeak and take him back. He's done enough to all of us already. Don't forget the troubles you've had with him before this. Look at what it costs you to maintain this seal patrol."

"It saved my life, didn't it?" Mr. Perry reminded him.

"Look out!" yelled Shorty.

Varkofsky had broken away from his grasp and leaped up the steps to the deck. He didn't hesitate. He jumped into the sea, clothes and all, and before Angus could follow he had threshed across to his boat. He ordered the sailors to pull him aboard.

Then he stood up, dripping, raising his fist aloft in anger like Neptune, the ancient sea god, rising from the sea in rage.

"I'll go!" he roared. "You won't take me back for trial. But this isn't the last of this, you hear? Listen to me, you brown-haired pup! Dan, I mean! You're the cause of all this. I'll hunt you down if it's the last thing I do. Nothing will stop me. And when I find you, boy, you'll wish you had never heard of Angus and that gun."

"Please let me get in a little target practice, Mr. Perry!" pleaded Angus, gripping his pistol and trembling with livid anger.

"No. He made his getaway and he's unarmed. It'd be murder."

Chapter VI

CAPTURED

DAN had a chilly feeling of impending disaster. He stood silently for a few moments, watching the dwindling figure of Varkofsky being rowed back to his crippled ship. Varkofsky, as long as he could see him, stood up in the rowboat's stern and shook his big fist in fierce challenge.

"A mite peevish, I'd say," Angus commented.

"I'm glad he threatened you instead of me," Shorty sighed.

"He's a dangerous man, Dan. I'd advise you to stay out of his way," Mr. Perry remarked.

Dan heard each of them, but his thoughts were still his own. He was thinking about Varkofsky's challenge, and what he'd do if Varkofsky suddenly caught him off guard some time. Dan knew then, as some men do at one time in their lives, that his entire career would be a battle with this giant Russian. Dan knew that he would have to concentrate every ounce of his strength and every bit of his ability to put Varkofsky permanently out of his way.

Dan accepted that challenge. He knew it was a long chance, but in the same moment he knew it was either himself or Varkofsky. And the first man to forget the other for an instant would lose.

"Come below, Dan," came his father's voice. "There's a great deal I want to know about this."

Dan's thoughts broke off abruptly. Like a man awaking from a bad dream, he shook his head to clear it and blinked a few times as he came down the steps to his father's side.

"How badly hurt are you, dad?" he asked.

"Badly enough," his father grunted. "Hurts like thunder. I've got two bullets in my back somewhere. I can't stand up. But as long as I stay in bed and don't get excited, I make out all right."

Dan turned his head, that his father might not see his expression.

"Angus," he said, softly, "get us to Seward harbor right away."

Angus nodded. He didn't have to be told of the need for haste.

"Now—" Dan began. Briefly but forcefully he told the story. The elder Perry listened intently to Dan's tense recital and when he had finished, he forced a smile to his thin lips.

"Wonderful!" breathed Anson Perry. "Unbelievable!"

"You can thank Angus for the way things turned out," Dan said.

His father nodded. "Son," he said, "the excitement's over for the time being. You've lost a night's sleep and you've been going on your reserve all day. Lie down here on these blankets and sleep. Get a good rest. Seward harbor is a long way off yet. We'll call you."

Dan was thankful for the opportunity. There

was nothing much he could do for his father except to rush him to a hospital at Seward, and Angus could be trusted to do that. With a yawn, Dan rolled up in the thick, wooly Hudson Bay blankets which Angus found for him, and was dead to the world almost as soon as he had closed his eyes.

On the opposite side of the cabin, Shorty was giving a good imitation of a buzz-saw cutting through a knotty pine board. Dan's regular breathing rose and fell. Anson Perry, looking long and wonderingly at Dan's slumbering form, finally turned his face to the wall and dozed. Angus thoughtfully closed the hatchway, shutting off the outside sunlight.

"I never thought I was running a floating hotel," he grinned.

He throttled the big engine to a soothing purr. He could have opened up and made the landfall at Seward within three or four hours. But the vibration, and the pounding, and the noise would have interrupted the sleep of his passengers. So he coasted along at a quiet six knots per hour, and gave them a good twelve hours of uninterrupted rest. Finally he knocked on the cabin hatchway.

"We're almost in," he barked. "Here's the Resurrection Bay light. Hit the deck, you cross-eyed gunners."

"Ho hum," yawned Shorty. "I'm hungry. How about you fellows?"

"I could eat a horse," Dan answered. "I wish Suki were here."

"Well, let's get Dad to a hospital first," Dan sug-

gested. "While we're doing that, Angus can cruise down the coast and pick him up. He'll be back here before we're ready to leave. Then Suki can stay with Dad, and look out for him while we're gone."

"Wait a minute!" Shorty barked. "Where do you get that 'we' stuff? And where, may I ask, do you think you're going?"

"As soon as Dad's comfortable," Dan shot back, firmly, "I'm going to fly back to that island and see if I can't help chase Varkofsky's gang off. I'm going to get the lay of the land first, and then——"

"Don't, son, don't," breathed Mr. Perry. He had grown a good deal weaker during the long slow trip, and both boys could see he was suffering a great deal. "Stay away from the island."

"Now Dad," soothed Dan, "I'm not going to land on the island. I want to land down the lake somewhere, conceal the plane, and then start on foot up the shore. I'll get as close to it as possible, and take some notes. I'll have a report ready for you by the time you're ready to leave the hospital. Then we'll *both* fly back there and drive this gang out."

"Tell me some other time," murmured his father. "I'm—I'm——"

"He's unconscious!" Shorty blurted.

Dan hurried to his side and made a hasty examination. He found his father's pulse fluttery, and very weak. He could hardly distinguish his breathing at all. With panic in his heart, Dan urged Angus to hurry.

They docked at the long, rock-studded pier that juts out into the shallow harbor of Seward, and

telephoned for an ambulance. Seward is not a very large city, but it had a well-equipped hospital and quick ambulance service. Within fifteen minutes, Anson Perry was on a white-covered table in the emergency room, an anxious surgeon bending over him.

"Oxygen, nurse," the surgeon's voice commanded, "Quickly."

Dan and Shorty paced the corridor outside. It was an hour or more before the surgeon came out, removed his glasses and motioned for Dan.

"Your father had a close call, my boy," he told him. "If you'd been an hour later, we wouldn't have had a chance. As it is, I'd say his condition is critical. He'll be here for a long time."

"But, doctor," Dan's voice was shaking. "He didn't say——"

"That's Anson Perry for you," muttered the doctor' shaking his head. "He wouldn't give in if he were dying. He's a stubborn old cuss. But he has done a great deal for us up here in Alaska. You may be sure he'll have the best of care."

"I'm sure of that," Dan nodded, "but exactly what is the trouble?"

"Two bullets in the back," snapped the doctor. "Isn't that enough? One of them punctured his left kidney, went right through and flattened out against his breastbone. The other chipped off a piece of the fifth lumbar vertebrae in his spine and paralyzed him. He had the worst pleural hemorrhage I've ever seen. No help, you see? No attention all that time since he was wounded. And

all that lugging and banging around didn't help any. A lesser man wouldn't have lived two hours after being shot like that."

Dan hardly heard him. His mind was in a whirl. He was thinking of Varkofsky. The leering, sneering face of that Russian devil haunted him. Dan raised his two hands and clenched his fists until the nails bit into his palms. His eyes were almost snapping sparks.

"I'm with you, Dan," Shorty exclaimed. "Count me in. After what the doctor said, I can't stay here and see you tackle Varkofsky alone."

"Come on," Dan growled. "Let's go down to the dock and wait for Angus to get back with Suki. As soon as he comes, we'll go back, get our plane, and take off for Radium Island!"

"Check," agreed Shorty.

"And we'll get that Russian and bring him back here," shouted Dan.

"Double-check," Shorty burst out.

They visited Anson Perry's white-walled hospital room once more and Dan silently took his father's hand in his in signal of farewell. The hand dropped limply to the white sheet. That was all Dan could stand. Beckoning to Shorty, he stalked out of the hospital and walked about the dimly-lighted streets of Seward for hours to regain his composure.

Never in his life had he hated any living soul with the fiery bitterness with which he hated Varkofsky. He had never believed himself capable of such animal savagery. All his sudden fear for his father's life; all his nervous reaction to the tight strain of the

past two days, formed into a consuming hatred for the cause of it all: Varkofsky.

Toward morning, Angus' powerful craft came whizzing into the harbor with a grinning Suki aboard, and straightway put off again with the two silent and saddened boys. They had a chance to snatch a few hours' sleep until dawn of the following day, when Angus once more put into the narrow inlet where their plane was safely concealed. But neither slept much. Their thoughts were mainly concentrated on the hazardous task before them.

They transferred their reserve gasoline from the drums in the cabin to the wing-tanks, and traded the empty drums to Angus for an adequate supply of food. When it was securely clamped down in rows of crates in the cabin, and the giant motors were warming, Dan spoke his final word to Angus.

"Keep up your patrol," he urged. "If you see that ship repaired and coming back toward this coast, let 'em have it. Don't take any chances of Varkofsky himself landing here until I've cleaned out his gang from that island. Promise me that, Angus."

"That I'll do, Dan," Angus said. He'll not land here if I can prevent it. And I'll help Suki help your dad to get well again, too."

"Thanks," Dan responded, gripping his hand. "Well, goodbye."

"Good luck," Angus called as the sleek Electra roared down the inlet and lifted gracefully into the morning sky.

It is difficult, on the Arctic Circle, to distinguish

daylight from twilight in the late autumn. The sun hangs at a certain point most of the day, sinking lower and lower day by day, until winter sets in. Then there is no sun at all, day or night. Accordingly, the sky appeared about the same as at any other hour of the day, when, at four P.M., after several hours of steady flying, Dan set the plane down on the icy waters of Great Bear Lake a few miles below the island.

They cut down small bushes and ripped off the lower branches of some stunted pines along the shore. With these they covered the wide wing, the long cabin, the huge motors. Dan carefully drained the oil out of both motors and locked it in the cabin in leak-proof cans. He strapped down their canvas weather covers. He disconnected the switch terminals. Nobody could start the motors then, or tamper with them.

After a hasty snack of supper prepared on the cabin stove, they set out along the shore-line toward the island. They were in no hurry, and were careful not to expose themselves to view as they approached. They clung to the underbrush and cautiously edged their way toward the narrow strait which separated the island from the shore.

At length they were directly opposite. They lay in the cold weeds a few yards from shore, and watched for signs of activity.

They saw at once that Varkofsky had meant to keep the island for himself. He had erected a strong wooden wall across the island opposite the shore.

They saw no smoke from cabin chimneys, no

airplane landing or taking off, no sign of occupancy whatever. Their view of the large island was blocked somewhat by the wall, and Dan suggested in a whisper to Shorty that they continue up the shore a short distance and see whether the wall girded the whole island, or was just a defense against attack from the closest point on the mainland.

Varkofsky had cut down hundreds of the straight-trunked northern pines to make that wall. It was at least a mile long. As they gained a point where they could see behind it, they saw row upon row of cabins facing what appeared to be a street, with a larger log building at the end of it.

"Typical Russian layout," Dan commented quietly to Shorty. "Looks like a Siberian prison post. What's that other building back there?"

"A factory, I guess," Shorty said. "It has a sheet-iron roof, and a smokestack. But there's white vapor coming out of the stack, not smoke."

"I guess it's their ore reduction mill," Dan hazarded, "where they crush the ore so they can ship it out by airplane in sacks and transfer it to the ship out there in the ocean."

"You mean the ship that *was* out there in the ocean," Shorty grinned.

"Maybe it's—Shorty! Look out behind you!"

Shorty had no time to get to his feet, and as Dan jumped up a huge, hairy fist knocked him sprawling again. Two unkempt giants were suddenly upon them, slapping, cuffing, winding them around and around in a thin leather rawhide line and stuffing dirty gags into their mouths. They squirmed

and kicked, but the two great ape-like men merely lifted their captives to their shoulders like sacks of grain and tossed them with bone-jarring thumps into a small boat which had been concealed on shore.

Dan had no chance to cry out. He could hardly breathe. Shorty was face-down in the brackish water in the bottom of the boat, but he managed to turn his head and get air in his lungs. The boat was pulled across the narrow strait, and hidden on the island under an overhanging clump of bush. Then the two silent giants picked up the boys again and opened the gate in the wall.

Inside, they kept on straight along the wide, littered street of cabins until they reached the official-looking building at the end. There they were dumped on a rug in front of a warm fireplace, and their rawhide bonds unwound. Other hands stood them up in front of a carved desk, behind which sat a middle-aged man, partly-bald, with a thin face and a high-bridged, hawk-like nose. His eyes were narrowed and sinister. He sat back in his chair and placed the tips of his fingers together in a quizzical gesture of appraisal.

"Where'd you get these lads?" he asked the huge captors.

"Lying in the bush, spying on us, Excellency," one of them said.

"Where'd you come from? You—the tall one?"

"Oh, we're just sightseers. That's all," Dan ventured.

"H'm. Probably from the States. Makes it awk-

ward. We can't send 'em back now. They're here, and they've seen the place, so they'll have to stay. What's your name, you?"

"Stephen Girard," spouted Dan, giving him the first name that came into his mind. It would be fatal to give the name of Perry.

"And yours?" the man said, turning to Shorty.

"Philander C. Knox," burst out Shorty, with pride.

"Well, I don't know what you were doing spying around up here when your own settlement is a hundred miles south," the man said. "But you knew you took a chance, and you lost. You'll never see the States again. Your relatives will think the wolves got you. Put 'em to work!"

Chapter VII

RADIUM BURNS

As he was led away, Dan heard the loud and uncontrolled laughter of the official called "Excellency" booming forth. He must think it was very funny to catch Dan and Shorty lying in the weeds spying on him. There might be a joke in it somewhere, but Dan couldn't see it.

There was nothing funny about the situation to him. He felt confident that he could find a way out for Shorty and himself, but until he was familiar with the island and its system, he would knuckle under and behave as he was expected to.

They were led rapidly down the street past the line of cabins, and made a turn to the right along another shorter street that ran at right angles to it. More log cabins loomed up before them in the fast-fading twilight—how many, they couldn't guess. Possibly not more than five or six, scattered on both sides of the street.

The guards stopped them in front of one of these cabins and knocked softly at the door. It was opened by a bearded, bleary-eyed ruffian with an incredibly dirty face, who stared first at the guards, then at the boys.

"Got a couple more for you," the guard said.

"White kids from below the line. Boss says to put 'em to work."

The bearded old ruffian stood aside, and the two boys were shoved inside. The door slammed. It was pitch dark inside. Even the small windows were barricaded. The air was heavy with the stagnant odor of many men. They heard the snoring, sighing and rustling of exhausted sleepers. Their bearded guide led them down the aisle in the cabin to the farthest wall, and showed them a double bunk, one above the other. He grabbed Dan and pushed him into the lower one, and indicated with a dig in the ribs that Shorty was to climb into the upper by means of two stirrups cut into the log wall. Not a word was spoken. The sleeping men hadn't stirred.

Obediently they took their places. They started to undress, but the bearded guard merely took away their outer clothes and threw down great piles of strange clothing for them to put on in the morning. Then he stalked out as quietly as he could. The boys pulled some dirty blankets over themselves and lay quietly.

Morning came at length, an icy Arctic morning, with frost on the barred windows and a fresh fall of snow on the roofs. It was early September, not yet into the Arctic winter, but on Great Bear Lake summer is hardly more than a fleeting thaw. Dan awoke with a start when he heard a great brass gong clattering and clanging forth. He jumped up. He thought it was a fire.

"What the Sam Hill happened?" demanded Shorty, sticking his tousled head over the rail of the top bunk.

"It means get up, I guess," Dan yawned. "Look at the clothes that guard left for us."

Thick felt *mukluks*, Arctic boots, lay on the floor. Wind-proof pants, and fur *parkas* for each of them. Not the light-weight kind, but the old-fashioned pelt fur garment that came well below the knees and had a belt made of the same fur around the waist. A huge fur hood lay against the back of their necks when they put these garments on, but when wintry blasts came roaring down from outside these hoods would come up over their caps and protect their faces.

"There isn't a white man in the barracks here," Dan told Shorty in a quiet voice. "They look like Indians to me. What do you think?"

Shorty gave the room a thorough inspection from his lofty bunk. He could count more than sixty emaciated red-skinned men, thin and sickly-looking, struggling with the fastenings of their heavy boots. They were as silent as wax images, and appeared to have very little life in them.

None of them so much as glanced at the two newcomers, even though they all knew of the two boys' arrival. Being at the extreme end of the long barracks, Dan and Shorty fell in line behind these silent and sour-looking Indians and moved slowly out of the double doors at the end and across a narrow street to the mess-hall.

"Wow!" Dan grunted. "Keep your hood up around your face, Shorty. This feels like winter already."

The icy wind blasted their faces as they leaned into it, head down. They struggled across the street and into the mess-hall, where they climbed across a long bench and sat down to a slab of fish and a tin cup of scalding hot liquid that turned out to be the Russian's idea of tea.

The smell of it turned the boys' stomachs. They watched the silent Indians munching slowly on their fish, pulling it out from between their teeth with both hands. It was the only way to eat the food, so the boys tried it.

They couldn't do it. The stench was nauseating. It was that rancid fish-oil smell that even hardened Arctic explorers never seem to be able to take without flinching. The whole room reeked with it. Dan looked around to see if he could find a biscuit, a crust of bread. But he only brought down upon himself a surly guard with a short-handled whip, who stung him across the back and pointed to his plate.

That was the last time Dan looked around. He sat there with a feeling of panic until the other captives filed slowly outside, and he followed them. Shorty walked silently beside him.

Onward they trudged, not knowing or caring where they were going. The procession filed about a quarter of a mile down a roadway to a low cliff, where a hill had been cut away to reveal the deposit of precious ore under its surface. It was about

twenty or thirty steps down a wooden stairway to the diggings.

The hill had been laboriously cut away in a huge crescent shape. But the wind was blowing directly into the cut. The Russian claim-jumpers had put up a high canvas wall along the edge of the cut to protect the workers somewhat, and it was billowing and wriggling against its rope lines as the procession filed behind it and down the steps.

Dan could see a long, thick vein of black substance along the lower edge of the cut. It looked like coal from a few feet away, except that upon a nearer approach it proved to be a little lighter in color and dull in appearance, without a coal vein's sparkle. Dan was handed a heavy pick, and Shorty was set to work shovelling the broken ore into a little dump car that ran on a narrow-gauge track alongside the workings.

Whack! Whack! Dan's pick began sinking deep into the soft black rock. It split apart with an outward pull of the pick, and fell in big chunks to the ground where Shorty's shovel transferred it to the cars. Around them, the stolid, silent Indians were doing the same thing, but with as little effort as possible.

Dan looked intently at the black rock-like ore he was yanking out. He found himself getting curious about it. It was a little lighter to lift than coal, and it seemed on close examination to be porous, and full of little air-holes. He saw a wild jumble of little craters and bubbles in its surface, like lava that had been molten at some time millions of years ago

and had frozen in that weird, wild pattern. Dan took off his thick felt mittens and stooped over to pick up a piece of it for closer examination.

There was a warning shout from some Indian on his right. Before Dan could pick up the piece in his fingers, the Indian had leaped over beside him like a cat, struck away the piece of ore and brushed Dan's hand aside from it.

He noticed that the Indian had kept his hand in his glove while he was brushing Dan's arm away. He motioned for Dan to put his glove back on his hand. Then, by way of explanation, he took his own hand out of his felt mitten and extended a skinny brownish arm that made Dan groan.

Large, raw sores, erupted all over the back of his hand and up his arm. They resembled infested boils that had never been given treatment. The Indian thrust his hand back in his mitten again and pointed silently to a long row of low mounds raised above the sod in a regular pattern a short distance away. Graves! Dan didn't have to see any elaborate marble monuments to know what lay beneath those hillocks. Men who had died here, working this stolen claim. He shuddered. He knew that Varkofsky couldn't have been on the island for more than six months, and already, in that time——

The Indian was saying something under his breath, but it was a guttural grunt that Dan did not understand. The redskin looked around to see if the guard were about to descend on him with that whip, but he seemed satisfied that it was safe to explain. He pointed at the black ore, made a horrible face at

it, and drew his finger across his throat. Dan understood that. Poison! The rock was deadly.

Dan thanked the red man with a gesture and went back to work. As he slammed the pick deep into the ore vein, he was thinking that it was a noble thing for the Indian to have done. He, a total stranger, a possible spy, and certainly nobody who could help him, was nevertheless saved from a serious situation because this Indian was alert. He was watching everything around him, even if the guards saw merely another captive hammering out a day's work in the cut. Dan was grateful. But he had no chance to say anything more. The guards were too close to them.

At any rate, Dan didn't try to pick up any more of the mysterious rock that day. He kept on working, his back aching and his head dizzy from hunger. At noon there was a brief intermission for lunch and then the prisoners returned to the mines to toil endlessly till dark. Then, a guard blew sharply on a whistle and the pitiful crew marched wearily to the mess-hall.

After a simple meal of boiled mutton and black bread, Dan, Shorty and the Indians were shuttled back to the barracks for the night. Each bunk was provided with two or three pegs in the log wall beside it for the occupant's fur clothing, and the Indians began silently stripping off their fur garments and hanging them up. The room was long and low-ceilinged, made to appear lower than it really was because of the double rows of bunks. The stench of sweaty bodies was overpowering. But nobody

made any move to take a bath, and Dan's inquiring gaze roamed the room without finding any facilities for one. Shorty, before climbing up into his bunk, determined that he was going to get a bath. Both boys felt sticky after their heavy labor. They conversed about it in pessimistic whispers.

He pointed his finger at the Indian who had been watching him. He motioned. The Indian, in turn, motioned to the other Indian who was sitting on the edge of a bunk next to Dan's to change places with him. The change was made while the guard's back was turned. The Indian lay down on his stomach, his head turned toward Dan so the guard couldn't see his face.

Dan addressed him in halting French. The Indian replied in French that was worse than Dan's. But they understood it. Dan asked about a bath. The Indian said there was a shower room off the mess-hall, where everybody was supposed to strip and take a shower with some kind of special soap after each shift. But the Indians had gone on strike against it. No amount of beatings would make them take any baths.

Dan queried about the reason. The Indian replied that it was a preventative against the horrible skin burns caused by close contact with the radium-bearing pitchblende ore.

"I should think that would cause you to use it every day," Dan said.

"No," grunted the Indian. "We are captives here. We are beaten and half-starved and forced to work like dogs. We will all die here."

Dan suddenly remembered the line of newly-built mounds of earth near the diggings. He asked the Indians if they had been his people. The Indian nodded. Eighteen of them had died, he said, since the white man had come with gas grenades and gassed the whole tribe. When the warriors awoke, they were in this barrack, sentenced to hard labor for life. They had done no wrong, the Indian said. They had harmed nobody, and were supposed to be under the protection of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Yet here they were, more than a hundred of them, in a prison. The injustice of it had killed their desire to live, he said. They would take no baths. The rock was poison. It burned them like fire. In a little while they would all die. If they took a bath, they would live longer, have to suffer more, and work more. They wanted to die as soon as possible and get it over with.

Dan felt his skin crawling. A mass suicide! A forced strike against baths because it would prolong their lives! A hopeless determination to expose themselves to this vile burning stuff that ate away their skins and tortured them until they died in the agony of convulsions. These human beings preferred that to life in Varkofsky's camp!

Dan swiftly translated it and explained to Shorty. Both boys sat silently on the edge of their bunks, fighting down a mounting hysteria—a panic that rose up within them until they wanted to get up and scream, to claw and slash their way out of the building before that same fate overtook them.

Well Dan Perry knew, as he sat there on his bunk,

that continued contact with these infected Indians would contaminate them, too. Well he knew that he was in a hotbed of disease, an inferno of self-determined suicides intent on death as quickly as possible. Caught in this trap would be Dan Perry and Shorty Keenan, two Yankee airmen who came voluntarily all the way from Alaska to spend their last agonizing days in this horrible prison.

Chapter VIII

A PLAN OF ESCAPE

"Well, I'm sure of one thing," Dan Perry decided, pulling himself off his bunk. "I'm not a party to any suicide pact. I'm not anxious to die up here. Where's the guard? I want a bath. Guard! Guard!"

The bleary-eyed old turnkey who had admitted them the previous evening came hurrying down the aisle between the bunks, jingling his keys. He had never heard himself summoned before. He was nervous, and jittery. He had been drinking, too. The boys could smell that.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"Listen. I demand a bath. My partner here demands a bath. That is part of the compensation for working here. You've got a shower room off the mess-hall with some soap in it. All right, take us there."

"And snap into it," added Shorty. "We're in a hurry, my man."

"Y-yes sir. Right away sir. Say, what do you call this?"

Dan rose and Shorty followed him up the aisle behind the suspicious guard. Dan's mind was working fast, considering the energy he had used up dur-

ing the day. This guard was once somebody's servant. When Dan put on that ritzy tone and Shorty called him "my man," this guard had behaved as if he had been addressed that way before. Then he remembered where he was.

"How'd you happen to get here?" Dan demanded.

It was a long story. As the boys felt that queer soap sting into their skins, they heard the guard tell about the old days when he was a footman in the Manhattan town house of a millionaire. He was with the family for nearly twenty years. Then one afternoon he spilled a silver tray when he was serving some guests at a lawn party at their home on Long Island and, he said, his face went right in the punch bowl and he got so much of it on him that the "master" had told him he was drunk, and fired him. Of course he wasn't, Dan said. The dull-witted guard agreed. Of course not. He just got some of it on his breath when his face splashed into the punch bowl.

Well, the guard said, he was out of a job for a long time after that, but he got a few days' work once in a while as a waiter. Eventually, he became a Communist. He joined in their parades, and got himself jailed several times, and finally the U. S. Government deported him as an undesirable alien, whatever that meant. He'd been born in the Mile-End section of London, but instead of being sent to England he put off the boat at Leningrad, in the Soviets. Well, sir, he continued, he had a terrible time. They bounced him around from one place to another, made him work on farms and "what

not," and he ended up in a coal mine near Khabarovsk, a big division point on the trans-Siberian railroad. Varkofsky drafted about fifty men out of there one day by some conniving with the Soviet officials, and he'd been working for him since.

"What's your name?" Dan queried as he shut off the water.

"You look like quality, me lad," he said, "so I'll tell ye. I'm 'Erbert 'Awkins. But me Russian name's Blagovyeshchensky."

"I'll call you Mike for short," Dan said.

They scrambled into their thick furs and hurried back across the whistling gale blowing down the little street. Once more their guard "Mike" locked the door behind them, and made no sign that he regarded them as anything different from the other inmates. But the two boys felt vastly relieved. Dan lay back on his bunk while the overhead lights illumined the squalid scene, and smiled at the manifold mistakes in "Mike's" life.

Their Indian friend of the night before was again at their sides.

"Can you read English?" he whispered. Dan nodded. The Indian held out a small brown bottle with a doctor's label on it, with the request that Dan tell him what it meant. It was written in blue ink from a fountain pen, signed "H. W. Le Gros, M.D." and contained directions for applying tincture of mercurochrome to the festered sores on the Indian's arm. Dan applied it, while the red man winced and gritted his teeth. Then he bandaged it with a long strip of clean gauze which the Indian

held out to him, and fastened it tight with adhesive tape.

The doctor, it appeared, was located in the administration building. He had made a hurried inspection of the laborers while Dan and Shorty were taking their shower. He had seen this Indian's festered arm, and had taken a bottle out of his bag, tossed him some bandages and walked on. He wouldn't get close enough to expose his own flesh to that deadly peril. The Indians hailed Dan as a miracle man after the job was complete.

"Me," said the Indian, in the only English words he knew, "Little Bear. Me Malemute. Malemute."

"What's he saying?" asked Shorty, who couldn't catch the words.

"His name is Little Bear and he's a Malemute Indian. That's a tribe up here in the tundra through the Northwest Territories. Those big white Eskimo dogs are called Malemute huskies. They get their name from the tribe of Indians which Varkofsky raided for his dirty work here."

"You," said the Indian, "my friend." He repeated it in French.

Dan stood up. The Indian placed his diseased arm on Dan's chest. Dan placed his arm on the Indian's chest. They stood there a second or two. One by one the other Indians filed up and placed their outstretched arms on Dan's chest. He repeated the same gesture with each.

"You're going to catch a swell dose of radium poisoning," Shorty warned.

"It's safe unless you have an open cut or something," Dan answered.

"Oh yeah?" Shorty countered. "The doctor doesn't think so."

"He's probably infected himself," Dan shrugged.

Suddenly the electric lights were turned off from outside somewhere. The Indians sought out their bunks and fell asleep. Dan and Shorty did the same.

It was the first of many such days, week after week, wherein they lost all track of time and lived only from one meal to the next. Strong as they had been when they arrived, this terrific labor was developing Dan's back and arm muscles until they bulged like a wrestler's. Shorty took off all of his surplus fat, and began adding hard, sinewy muscle. Their hands grew calloused, then after a painful blistery interval, took on the toughness of sole leather. Their minds, too, were busy.

Dan's trained memory was never used to better advantage. Little by little, as he was transferred from one job to another, he began to learn the magnitude of the job facing them. He began to understand more and more that Varkofsky had planned and built this settlement as a permanent town, not just a temporary camp. He dismissed at once, as a lie, the promise that Varkofsky had made while dealing with his father for his release. He had said that if Anson Perry let him go, he'd move away from this island.

Dan soon learned that radium is the only practical cure, except surgery, for most cancer conditions in

the human body. Sometimes a cancerous growth will endanger a person's life in some hidden position inside the body where surgery would be helpless. Sometimes a tiny infant will be born with an appalling tumor on one of its tiny legs, and the shock of a surgical operation would bring death. That happened to one of the Dionne quintuplets, Dan remembered. Radium, rushed overland from Johns Hopkins Hospital at Baltimore, saved her feeble life.

The longer Dan worked on the island, the more he came to understand the fight going on all over the world for the control of cancer through radium, that mysterious substance that never tires out, never wears out. Radium, that shoots out millions upon millions of microscopic particles every second, yet never loses its own weight. Radium, the precious little pellet weighing one ounce and worth two million dollars, capable of saving the lives of a nation.

With an interest that grew daily Dan watched the pitchblende being run through heavy ore crushers and refined in a charcoal oven to drive off most of the bulk. A hundred tons of raw ore thus became one ton of concentrate, which was loaded into sacks lined with lead foil and placed aboard Varkofsky's big airplanes. These planes flew a ton at a time to the big freight ship in Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska where the boys had finally overcome Varkofsky at sea. The ship carried the ore to the Siberian seaport of Vladivistok, where it was run through the final refining plant.

It required three hundred tons of concentrated ore, and three hundred tons of chemicals, and more

than a hundred different operations, to refine one ounce of radium. This ounce was then split up into grams, each in a triple-sealed leaden chest, and sold to hospitals through the Soviets and Europe for the relief of suffering cancer patients.

Gilbert LaBine, at his radium refining plant a hundred miles south, was selling his smaller output to hospitals and universities throughout the United States. Even with this double source of supply, there was not nearly enough radium in the world to control the spread of cancer. The medical profession pleaded for more. And every shipload of that concentrated ore that docked at Vladivistok made Varkofsky two million dollars richer.

That was the discovery that made Dan's blood boil. Thousands of tons of this precious ore had been dug out of the ground already. How much more of it could Varkofsky steal before something happened to drive him off? Could he ever be driven off? Dan lay awake night after night, wondering.

He could hear the Arctic blizzards whistling around the barracks. He could feel the sting of it against the thick sides of the building. Crossing the narrow street to the mess hall was an ordeal almost like fighting one's way across a polar ice floe. Those temperatures! Dan could never believe his own eyes when he saw sixty and sixty-five below zero registered on the mess-hall thermometer. His eyes stung and pained if he had to walk more than a quarter-mile against the blinding glare of the sun on the snow. The guards all had snow goggles, with their nose-pieces wrapped in string so they would not

freeze to the flesh. But nobody cared about the captives who did the work.

It was possible to survive only because by this time the vein being worked had retreated beneath the overhanging cliff, and regular mining operations were started. Timbers shored up the wide entrance, and the twin tracks for the narrow-gauge cars disappeared out of the Arctic blasts into the darkness of the horizontal shaft. They were three or four hundred yards inside the hill, out of the cold and the wind. But even with that protection they needed smelly stoves and rickety lengths of stovepipe to carry off the fumes.

Dan had lost track of the date. He didn't know whether it was December or February. Ever since he had been put to work digging, that first day, the guards around him had kept him at such hard labor that he scarcely had time to think of anything.

With the tunneling into the hill, Dan had been taken off the labor gang and put to work sawing timbers for the shoring job inside. Shorty had been "promoted." He had a soft job driving a long, low Deisel engine on wheels that pulled the loaded cars out of the tunnel. He took these up a long ramp to the side of the crushing plant, dumped them by hand, and pulled them back into the tunnel again. Twice on every trip he had to get off, throw a switch, and get back on the seat again. It was while doing this that he usually got frost-bitten, or froze his nose, or suffered some other damage.

In the short hour or so after the evening meal, Dan and Shorty would get their heads together and

try to figure some way out. They considered a dozen different plans, but rejected them. They wouldn't work.

They had nothing. The guards saw to it that they were not allowed to approach anything that might help them to make a dash for freedom. The Indians, they observed, were given all the freedom that they would take, but not Dan and Shorty. Every move was carefully watched.

And so the long, dark Arctic winter wore on, with the howling blizzards and the killing cold cutting off escape on foot; with the airplane hangar as remote from them as if it had been on the moon. Dan knew that the island boasted a powerful radio station, kept tuned to Varkofsky's ship or the base at Vladivistok constantly. Even if he could reach it, he couldn't raise anyone but Varkofsky himself.

It must have been sometime around Christmas when Dan first saw preparations going on throughout the camp for some kind of a celebration. He thought it was odd. He knew that good Communists do not celebrate Christmas because they do not believe in God, or any form of religion. But it probably was Christmas that called for all the scrubbing-up, and painting, of every building that was going on. One long winter evening while the gale howled and shrieked outside, Dan made his way to the barred door and talked between the bars to "Mike" about it.

"What are the big fellows getting ready for?" he asked.

"I noticed something meself," Mike said. "Be

patient, me lad. I'll hunt up His Excellency Count Boris Talaroff, the boss o' the camp. He used to be a big name in the Communist Party in Siberia. He had charge o' the mine where I worked. That's why he's workin' fer Varkofsky now. Well, I'll go and see. Don't go away. I'll be right back."

"We're not going anywhere!" Shorty grunted, eyeing the thick bars.

In half an hour Mike had returned. He sidled up against the door, took a careful look around to see if he were being overheard, and said behind the back of his hand:

"Ye're wrong, lad. It ain't Christmas they're gettin' ready for. His Excellency told me that Varkofsky's got his ship rebuilt again and he's crossed the sea in her. He's waitin' in Prince William Sound now for the plane from here to go and get him. He's goin' to visit us!"

Dan swallowed hard. Varkofsky!

His mind brought up a picture of this huge, bearded Russian standing in the stern of his rowboat raising aloft his great arms and vowing vengeance upon him. And here they were, under heavy guard, imprisoned in a barred barrack, waiting like rats in a trap for Varkofsky to carry out his threat!

"Mike!" groaned Dan, softly, clutching the bars of the door and beating against it with his fists. "Mike! We've got to get out of here. Right now. Tonight!"

Chapter IX

SLOW DEATH IN THE ARCTIC

For a few moments after Dan had blurted out this desperate plea, there was silence. Mike, the guard, was speechless with surprise and astonishment. He couldn't make his slow-moving brain work fast enough to provide an answer. Shorty was silent because he was thinking about Varkofsky's bull-headed luck in having fate play straight into his hand this way. And Dan said nothing because he was afraid of his own voice. He knew that if he kept on appealing to the guard he'd sound so desperate and so anguished that the Indians would know something had gone wrong by the tone of his voice.

"Anything you want, Mike!" Dan implored. "I'll pay any price I can raise. Get us out of here. Unlock that door before Varkofsky walks in and orders us out into a firing squad."

"Firing squad, is it?" Mike commented, quietly. "I'm thinkin' ye don't know the boss like we do. He'll no' let ye off that easy. No, sir. He's got quite a few nice ways o' torture to show ye. Quite a few."

"Can't you do something?" Dan demanded.

"What could I do?" Mike retorted in an angry whisper. "If I let ye out, the boss would make me

take yer place. And I've got no desire to go through what he's got in store fer y'."

Dan pounded on the door with the flat of his palm while he took a deep breath. It was just an effort to restore self-control, but it helped some. What could he do to make this dull-witted guard help him?

"You'd rather be back in New York, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Yus," Mike nodded.

"If we get away, we'll take you with us."

"Ah, no, lad," the guard shook his frowsy head. "Not fer the likes o' me. If ye ever get through them blizzards alive an' reach the LaBine workings to the south, the Mounties'll hang me higher than Haman. I'll be the whipping boy fer everything Varkofsky's done."

"Well, what do you want more than anything else in the world?"

"Nothin' you could give me, lad. I feel sorry fer ye, but I know when I'm well off. I'll help ye any way I can except lettin' ye oot. An' ye don't catch me stickin' me neck oot fer nobody."

"All right, never mind," responded Dan wearily.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed and he motioned Mike nearer. Reluctantly the guard approached the bars. Dan smiled strangely, then reached out through the bars as far as his arm would go, and gripped Mike's neck in his thick fist. He choked him until Mike's eyeballs almost protruded. There was hardly a sound. Shorty had no idea what Dan was trying to do, and he was waiting breathlessly

for the next step. Dan dug his fingertips deeper into Mike's fat neck, squeezed him, held up his drooping body with his left arm. Mike was taken completely by surprise. He reached up instinctively to claw away Dan's choking grip, but he lay limp and pawing feebly with his hands while he gasped for air.

Presently, without a further sound, Mike fainted.

Hurriedly, Dan thrust his right arm under the man's shoulder and commanded Shorty to grab his thick key ring. Then he let the guard drop to the cold floor outside the door without a sound. His arm, longer than Shorty's, held the key and quietly fitted it to the door.

"Run back to our bunk," Dan whispered, "and get our fur outfits. Motion to the Indians to keep quiet. I'll drag Mike in here out of sight."

In a few long, anxious moments, Shorty was back with parkas and felt boots. Little Bear, the leader of the doomed Indians, approached Dan and spoke to him quietly in French.

"Go to our village," he suggested, "on the great Mackenzie. You might reach it by morning. My brother, Yellow Cloud, will give you food and snowshoes. Tell them we are dying here. Good luck be with you."

Dan asked him in a whisper for further directions. The Indian replied in clipped monosyllables, Dan nodding that he understood. There was a swift exchange of handclasps. Then Dan and Shorty were outside the door, with the unconscious guard inside. Dan locked the door from the outside, and threw the heavy key ring out of the heavy outer door into

a swirling snowdrift. Bending their heads low against the whistling storm, they crossed the street and tried the door of the mess-hall.

It opened, and they felt their way between the long rows of hard benches toward the kitchen. Not daring to risk a light, they fumbled and felt about looking for some food storage cabinets, or a refrigerator, or a bread-box. Dan opened a refrigerator door and an electric light inside cast a startling glow over the kitchen. He shut it with a bang.

"Good night!" exploded Shorty. "That thing gave me a scare!"

"Me, too," Dan admitted. "I found some sliced meat. What've you got?"

"A big loaf of bread. That's all I can locate."

"All right. Let's get out of here."

They tip-toed past the door and made their way out into the Arctic storm. They kept close to the dark buildings as they edged down the street. They waded through deep drifts as they dodged between the barracks and the storehouse toward the high wall. They had less than a hundred feet to go.

"I wish we could get in there," Shorty whispered in Dan's ear. "I'll bet there are snowshoes and guns and everything else stored there."

"Hush!" Dan warned. "We've got to go this way or not at all."

When they arrived at the end of the wall, they saw a sentry sitting in his wind-proof shelter box at the end of the guard walk, bending over a small lantern. They flattened themselves against the wall,

and with great care eased themselves around it and gained the shoreward side.

"The tough part is ahead of us," Dan whispered. "We've got to go all the way back on the outside until we come to the main gate. That's the only place we can cross to the mainland."

"Lead on, MacDuff!" grunted Shorty. "That's from Shakespeare."

There was an aroused noise from the sentry above them, and he thrust open the door of his sentry box and began flashing a big light around him on the snow. He shot his rifle once, the whistling bullet zipping well over their heads into the opposite shore.

"That's from Varkofsky to us, with love," Dan answered. "They felt you scrape your boots against the wall while you were getting around it."

The sentry flashed the light everywhere except directly below him and, apparently seeing nothing, he retired into his box again. A telephone bell jangled clearly on the night air. The sentry answered it. They heard him telling the guard officer that he had felt a little bump against the wall but he had made a thorough search and found nothing. The guard officer evidently gave him a verbal lashing for shooting off his rifle and waking everybody up, because the sentry said: "Yes, sir," about six times and then hung up, growling irritably to himself.

"Come on," Dan whispered. The pair started carefully along the outside of the wall again, picking each step as carefully as if they were walking a tight-wire. They were invisible from the wall ex-

cept to somebody who might be leaning over it. Nevertheless they were a long way from the safety of the mainland.

A hundred yards or so from the main gate, Dan stopped and held a council of war with Shorty.

"Our best bet is straight across," he said. "But it's sixty below and there's a hundred-mile wind and the drifts are piling up and we haven't any snowshoes. It'll take us a long time to make the other shore. If they turn on that big searchlight, it'll pick us out. They can't miss us at that range. Shall we do that, or wait for this storm to get a little worse so they can't see through the snow even with their searchlight?"

"Let's go now," Shorty begged. "I'll take a chance on getting shot rather than freezing to death in this blizzard."

"All right," Dan nodded, striking out across the drifted snow, with Shorty following in his tracks.

Behind them they heard a sudden, sporadic outburst of excitement on the island. As soon as the main lights went on, Dan jerked Shorty flat on his face and began covering them both with snow with his mittened hands. Almost immediately the huge searchlight flashed into life, sweeping in a relentless arc back and forth over the ice-locked strait. The main gates were flung open.

"Lie still!" Dan warned. "We're a good hundred yards above where they'll cross. They won't see us if you don't move."

The yapping of Eskimo dogs broke out on the blackness of the night. Two long sledge teams of

six dogs each came bounding out of the main gate, darting across the ice while men ran behind them brandishing rifles aloft. There was much shouting and flashing about of lights. But that great searchlight swung back and forth as surely as the pendulum of a clock.

Each time it swung, it passed them with a fleeting pencil of light. Dan and Shorty were still burrowing into the snow with both hands, but when the searchlight approached, they'd lie quietly, flat on their stomachs, and it would pass over. Then they'd be up again, burrowing like animals until the great yellow ray came swinging back again. For fully an hour the two chums crawled and burrowed through the snow until they had cleared the range of the searchlight's penetrating beam. Then they rested, only to move on again at a swifter rate.

Toward morning, which meant little on the Arctic Circle in mid-winter as far as daylight was concerned, the two boys reached the shore safely and dodged into the brush. They located the shore-line and used it for a guide, beating their way southward against the wind down the lake. Their plane was probably buried under several feet of snow, now, but it had some equipment in it that they could use. It had a pressure stove to keep them warm and food to keep them alive. They could camp in its cabin and live on its emergency rations until they could devise a plan to get to the LaBine workings. The thought of that plane's sheltered cabin and a comfortable bed in it kept Dan fighting the storm at top speed hour after hour.

Shorty kept up as well as he could. But he seemed increasingly awkward about stepping into drift holes and sinking out of sight except for his head. Dan pulled him out of trouble until he, too, was exhausted.

On the afternoon of the first day of their escape they tried to eat, but it was useless. The sliced meat Dan had found in the mess-hall kitchen was frozen until it was like glass. It had shattered in his pocket and crumbled to bits of sparkling ice. The loaf of bread that Shorty had was frozen solid. They couldn't even thaw it out by chewing it.

They had no material to build a fire, and it would have been dangerous even if they could have done it. They had no snowshoes, and in drifts twenty feet deep along the shore they made anguished progress at a snail's pace by clinging to the tops of the scrub trees and pulling themselves along a foot at a time. Then Shorty would inevitably disappear with a yell of fear, and Dan would have to pull him out of a hidden hole. That exhausted both boys rapidly. Without food or heat, their fur parkas frozen to their shoulders by the stinging sleet, their bodies bent double to fight the everlasting gale, they found themselves growing weaker and weaker.

"How far is it to the plane?" Shorty demanded, panting for breath.

"I don't know," Dan retorted. "We'll have to keep on going until we strike it, that's all."

"We may have missed it," Shorty said tremulously, with the first symptoms of panic that causes most Arctic deaths. "Dan! We may have gone by it! "We're lost!"

"Shut up, you idiot!" snapped Dan, shaking him to stop his frenzied babbling. "Do you want to go back to that island and be the guest of honor at Varkofsky's party?"

"All right, all right," Shorty subsided, breathing deeply and trying to calm himself. "I'm a goner, either way. I'll never get home again. But at that, I'd rather freeze out here than give that Russian the pleasure of torturing me to death. I guess it's the best way."

"Quiet, now, Shorty," Dan soothed. "We're not done for yet. We may come out of it alive. If we can just keep going until we get to the plane we'll be all right. But keep still. That searching party may hear you yell."

"I'm going to stop and rest," sighed Shorty, falling into the snow.

"Shorty!" pleaded Dan, "Get up! You'll freeze there. If you don't keep moving you'll freeze in half an hour. Get up!"

Shorty stumbled to his knees, but slipped and fell flat on his face in the snow. He lay there, breathing heavily, like a man who had been close to drowning. Dan struggled with him, pleaded with him, tried to lift him. Dan was almost hysterical. His own strength was gone, but he tried to save Shorty with the last ounce of energy in his body.

Then he, too, felt the world spinning around like something out of a nightmare. He, too, fell into the snow, and lay there. He knew that his nose and chin were frozen, but he didn't care about that. He didn't care about anything any more.

It was so strange to him to try and catalogue his

own feelings at a time like that. He knew he was dying. He knew there was no help for nearly a hundred miles, and that enemies were hunting them, seeking to bring them back to the island. He'd freeze to death here on the shore of this great lake with the murky purple dimness of an Arctic winter day blotting out both the sun and the stars. He'd just lie there, feeling more and more comfortable, and more and more drowsy, until he couldn't feel anything any more and the world would vanish from before his eyes. That would be the end.

In fifty years, perhaps, some Indian or some explorer would stumble across their frozen bodies. They'd be perfectly preserved, just the way the bodies of other Arctic explorers had been found years after they had fallen in their tracks and laid down to await death.

"Shorty!" Dan panted. "Shorty! Can you hear me?"

There was silence. Shorty was past hearing anyone. He was still lying on his face, and the snow was already beginning to drift up in vicious swirls around his stiffened body to hide it from the sun.

The shrieking wind stirred up whipping eddies of snow that rippled the thick fur of his hood as he lay and watched it. The moan of that wind, rising to a fiendish whistle and then dying down to a low groan, was the last thing Dan heard. His eyelashes were frozen together. He heard the moaning wind dying away, as if from a great distance.

"I won't give up!" he told himself with his last conscious thought. "I won't give up! I'll fight the Arctic with my last breath!"

Chapter X

ROYAL NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

SOMETIME later Dan awoke. It was a crystal-clear Arctic night, the stars seemingly right down over their heads, and the wind gone. He struggled to open his eyes, and finally succeeded. But when he first attempted to move his body he seemed to be as helpless as a new baby.

But he was alive, and he'd won! The wind had died away for a few hours, at least, and that would give him a chance to dig himself out of the snow and revive Shorty—if he possibly could!

Within an hour he was able to crawl over the intervening space and examine Shorty. He took off his thick felt mitten and ran his hand inside Shorty's parka. His heart was beating faintly. Dan replaced his mitten and hauled himself upright by clinging to a protruding branch of a dead tree that was sticking up through the snow. As Dan tried to clamber to his feet by clinging to it, the dead branch broke off and let him down again. He fell headlong into a drift-hole in the snow until he struck a rock and slid off that, dropping even farther down into what seemed a bottomless pit.

He slid to a stop sitting upright against the rock, out of the weather above and with plenty of air.

He was safe, as long as he stayed there. He could see the free air above, a dim purple in the Arctic sky. Shorty lay ten feet above him in the snow. It might have been ten miles. Dan couldn't get up to him.

At the end of a long time, perhaps an hour, he twisted his body to see if there was a cleft in the rock behind him which might serve as a foothold in the fight to regain the surface. It was dark in the hole, and he had to feel his way about with his mittened hand.

There was something on the surface of this rounded rock that might give him a foothold. He twisted farther around, and knelt facing the rock so he could use both hands. It was a straight gash. His hands pawed away the snow so he could feel about a little farther. It was slippery at that point. There was a section of this object that was as slippery as ice. Then the rougher surface of the rock began again.

He took off his mitten to feel of it. Yes, it was ice all right. But the surrounding territory didn't feel like rock. It vibrated. He doubled up his fist and rapped on it. It sounded hollow.

The plane! He was sitting right on it! He had been feeling of the cabin window. He had fallen into a hole caused by the eddying of the wind around the nose, and had slipped down the rounded side of the cabin to sit upright on the broad wing.

That discovery stimulated him enough to paw frantically with his hands and open a passage for his body to the cabin door. It was locked, of course.

The key had been in his other clothes—the ones taken from him at the island. But Dan knew how he could get in. He fought his way to the pilot's compartment, slid back the window and reached inside. He fumbled about in the icy blackness until his mittened hand found the release to the narrow baggage compartment beneath the floor. Then he dug down until he found the outside door to the nose compartment, crawled in, lifted the floor up with his shoulders and came up in the pilot's compartment.

He switched on the cabin lights. They sprang into life. The big battery apparently was still showing a charge. He closed the window, replaced the floor plates, and came staggering weakly down the cabin until he came to the door. It opened easily enough from the inside.

There was a slender anchor chain somewhere inside. Where was it? He couldn't give way now, when means of sustaining life were so close at hand. He forced his whirling brain to recall where he had put that chain. He used it to anchor the floats when he was making a water landing. At length, he remembered the chain was in the nose compartment, where he had entered.

He turned off the lights and came outside, feeling along the side of the fuselage until he reached the nose. He retrieved the chain, closed the small door, and climbed up on the cabin roof. With the small anchor and its chain in his hand, he made a half-dozen casts up into the night air above until the anchor hooked Shorty's shoulder.

Then he pulled. He tugged, and stopped to rest, and tugged again. Shorty's body was moving a few inches at a time. Dan prayed that the anchor would not slip. Suppose it did give Shorty a deep bruise on the shoulder? What of it? And so Dan tugged again, and pulled, and tugged some more.

Shorty's feet were the first parts of his body to appear at the edge of the hole. Dan grasped them, steered his body so that it would slide down the inclined wall of snow, and heaved. Down came Shorty, feet first. Dan grabbed him to keep him from falling over, and by a series of short pushes he maneuvered Shorty toward the cabin door and inside. Then Dan closed the door again and turned on the lights.

Some few hours later, after repeated applications of snow and a long careful massage, Shorty's half-frozen body began to respond to Dan's treatment. He was breathing regularly, twitching and groaning. Dan had hot soup ready for him as soon as he regained consciousness. He baked hot biscuits in the small portable oven; made a pot of steaming coffee. After Shorty had eaten a few bites, he began massaging the lower parts of his legs for himself. He still couldn't talk.

They stayed there day after day, slowly and painfully regaining their strength. Shorty was kept in bed, and Dan stayed in bed, too, except for the few duties concerned with preparing food and refilling the tank on the pressure stove. Two weeks went by in that manner. Weeks of gradual recovery.

It must have been somewhere in the third week

when the boys were startled out of a sound sleep by the harsh baying of dogs.

Dan and Shorty looked at each other wide-eyed. Varkofsky! The searching party!

"You stay in bed," Dan told Shorty. "We've got a rifle here, anyhow, and plenty of ammunition for it. Let 'em come down here after us!"

A powerful searchlight flashed down the hole. Dan heard voices—two men talking to each other in English. The light flashed about, disclosing the outlines of the plane and the unmistakable give-away of the boys' footprints outside, where they had scooped up snow for drinking water.

"By all the Saints!" came a booming voice. "Look at the lines of her, will you? Biggest plane I ever saw. Twin motored, too. Great guns, Mac. Shoot up your radio mast and get busy with your key."

"Who d'ye suppose the poor devils were?" the other voice asked, in stricken sympathy. "Whoever they were, they're dead now, God rest 'em. I never got any report of a plane this size flying over. Did you?"

"No. Get the Inspector. I'll go down and see if——"

"No you won't!" barked Dan. "Whoever you are, stay right there. If you attempt to come down here, I'll plug you."

The two men were astonished into momentary silence.

"Voices!" they breathed. "Is it possible that——"

"Yes, we're alive," Dan growled. "But *you* won't be if you don't do what I tell you. Talk fast, you

two. Who are you and where'd you come from? How'd you happen to find this plane?"

"Yanks, by the sound of 'em," said one. "Hello, down there. We're Constables Duncan Graham and James MacNeill, of the Hay River Post of the Royal North-West Mounted. We're on our annual Arctic patrol up along the shore of the lake. Who might you be and how'd you get there?"

"Mounties!" yelled Dan. "Shorty! Help's here!"

"Don't believe it," grunted Shorty. "It may be a trap."

"Come down one at a time," commanded Dan. "Have you got any medicine?"

"We've somethin' here," answered one, in a flat Scotch voice. "But it may not help you. Coming down. Oop! Put down that rifle, young fellow. We'll get you out and to a hospital in no time."

His partner came sliding down the packed snow to stand beside him. They came inside. Dan made them some coffee, and for four solid hours poured forth coffee and information. He told the whole story. He described the guarded island; Varkofsky's wholesale kidnapping of the Malemute Indians, the jumping of his father's claim, and their escape. He told how they had lived cooped up in the buried cabin of their plane for weeks, trying to regain strength after nearly dying of exposure.

The Mounties looked at each other and nodded sympathetically. Their story, of course, was absurd. They'd probably been flying to the Pole or on some wildcat adventure trip and had been forced down on the shore of the lake where they'd been living ever

since. The gasoline pressure stove had used up most of the oxygen in the cabin, day after day. These boys had grown weaker and weaker until they were having visions. It frequently happened, especially to tenderfoot American kids.

"Never you mind," soothed MacNeill. "We'll get in touch with our base at Hay River Post and they'll fetch you out on dog-sleds. It's winter up above, you see? It's January. Sometimes it's sixty below."

"This boy's got a fever," remarked Constable Graham, running a kindly rough hand over Shorty's forehead. "Bad one. We've no time to lose."

"Right you are," rejoined MacNeill. "Well, you stay here and do for 'em. I'll go up and see if I can raise the Post on my set."

"How'll they get to us?" asked Dan. "On dog sleds?"

"I don't know," Constable Graham answered. "In a case of emergency they might fly you out. It's two hundred and forty miles to the Post. This boy, this one here, might not live long enough to make the trip by dog team. You don't look so healthy, either. I guess we'll fly back."

The two Mounties stayed in constant attendance until the far-away droning of an airplane motor announced that help had arrived. Then one of them climbed up to the surface and signalled directions for landing. A short time later a huge trimotor on skis came down on the lake. The two chums were quickly bundled into the plane which flew back to the Mountie settlement.

Hay River Post turned out to be a small collection

of strongly-built log buildings on the shore of a wide lake. Dan noticed the three jutting radio towers as the ship circled for a landing. His eyes took in the long stone pier thrusting itself out into the ice-locked lake; the clean, wholesome atmosphere of the well-kept Post buildings. The huge ship landed on the ice, turned, and taxied back toward the stone pier.

Everybody in the small settlement had turned out to meet them, massing in a line of black figures on the pier. Strong hands picked up Shorty's cot with its squat little oxygen tent, and hurried him inside one of the buildings. Other hands picked up Dan, on his cot, and carried him inside a warm, efficient-looking hospital.

The whole incident seemed like part of a dream. Dan lay there obediently as muscular Mounties stripped him, bathed him, put him in a high, white hospital bed. Shorty was beside him, and was responding to the medical treatment, and Dan slept contentedly.

When Dan awoke, other strangers were crowding around his bed, asking numerous questions. He couldn't tell a coherent story. The strain of the whole experience was telling on him, and Dan could only shake his head wearily and ask them to wait until he felt better.

A distinguished-looking officer came in, when the room was quiet, and sat down beside his bed. He introduced himself as Inspector Grosvenor, in charge of the Mounted forces in the Northwest Territory, and thus responsible for their safety. Patiently, he

asked Dan to repeat the story he had told Graham and MacNeill.

At its conclusion, the Inspector stood up and stroked his mustache in silent contemplation. He looked at Dan queerly.

"I'll have to check it up," he commented. "Of course, it wouldn't do to tell these reporters anything of that sort. They'd think you were still balmy. Keep it to yourself, son. I'll communicate with Seward, Alaska, and find out if your father is in the hospital there. If so, he might be able to shed some light on it. Also, I'll raise the operator at LaBine's workings and see if they've heard anything about this fellow Varkofsky. Just rest a few hours. I'll be back."

Dan slept. He didn't care whether Inspector Grosvenor believed him or not. All he wanted was rest, quiet, medical care.

It was a very different Inspector Grosvenor who came rushing in after Dan had finished his nap. He locked the door, and drew up a chair close to Dan's side in order not to be overheard.

"Young man," he began, "please forgive me. This is the most awful story I've ever heard. It's true. Every word of it. Your father is doing well at Seward, but the facts he gave me, the appalling cruelty of it are beyond belief. I'll see that this thing's corrected. I'll get that man Varkofsky and all his gang off that island. But you'll have to help me. Is that clear?"

"Well, certainly I'll help you," Dan promised.

"We'll help each other. If you're going to take action, I'll follow your orders."

"That's the spirit," nodded the Inspector. "This is terrible, my boy. I've had a fine record for thirty years in the Service. I've got to succeed now. I've got to drive those outlaws off. But the worst part of it is that I can't appeal for outside help!"

Dan's spirits fell.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's hard to explain," the Inspector continued, looking at his fingernails to keep from facing Dan. "This is Canada, you see. We have a different sort of public sentiment toward crime here than you do in the States. I mean, it wouldn't do at all for me to go howling to the Dominion Government at Ottawa for troops, and bombers, and all that. I'm supposed to be able to run my own district. And by gad, sir, I'll run it."

"I can understand that," Dan nodded.

"But such a large-scale criminal enterprise has never been heard of in Canada. Especially in some remote place like the Arctic circle. We're not set up to wage a wholesale war. Can't you see that?"

"Well, then, Inspector, what are your plans?" Dan asked.

"My plans," said the Inspector, in a low voice, "call for complete silence on your part, and that of your friend. I don't want to let Varkofsky know what I intend to do until I'm ready to do it. Then, if you're strong enough, and brave enough, and above all if you can trust the Mounties—*we'll do it!*"

Chapter XI

DAN FLIES AGAIN

INSPECTOR GROSVENOR, Dan thought to himself, was a great man. He had to face a situation that was impossible, but he had backbone enough to accept the challenge. He had the responsibility of restoring Radium Island to its rightful owner, Anson Perry. He had the job of bringing Varkofsky to trial along with his hundred-odd gangster crew. And as far as Dan Perry could discover from a close scrutiny of the Hay River Post of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, the Inspector had about eight men and some dogs, a few rifles, and an astounding confidence in the ultimate triumph of right over wrong.

That wasn't enough, Dan knew. All kinds of stubborn British bulldog courage wouldn't be much good against a withering hail of machine-gun bullets, Dan mused, impatient after four days in the hospital and eager to be moving again. His lungs were completely aired out and cured of the ailment that had put him there. He was feeling better. He was generating his usual boundless energy, and he wanted to head north. He wanted to fling himself into this show-down battle, to add his own strength to the

Mounties' pitiful little array. But he still was forced to lie idly in bed.

Shorty had been critically ill. For four days it was a nip-and-tuck fight against death. He lay in a coma in that little oxygen tent, breathing, being fed through a tube, and with two nurses in constant attendance at his bedside. His fever stayed constant at a hundred and three and six-tenths. On the fourth day it began to rise slowly, but with a sureness that sent the nurses hurrying for ice-packs and the doctor. For two hours Shorty's temperature went up. It reached a hundred and four and eight-tenths.

"He's a goner," the doctor said. "He can't stand a hundred and five. It'll kill him. It must break now or——"

Shorty's fever was the result of a badly-infected blood stream. Dan's lungs were stronger, and because he was moving around more during their confinement in the airplane cabin he got more fresh air. But the combination of exposure and gas had been too much for Shorty Keenan.

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Dan in a whisper.

"Nothing any of us can do," the doctor said. "It's his fight."

Dan felt ice-cold beads of moisture on his forehead. He was scared—really frightened. It was the first sensation of genuine fear Dan Perry had ever known. He sat up in bed and wrung his hands aimlessly, watching Shorty's white face through the celluloid window of the oxygen tent.

"You'd better get your mind off this," the doctor

said. "Why don't you put on a bathrobe and slippers and go on down the hall to the Inspector's office? Get into an argument with him. Tell him he's a stuffed shirt. That always gets him. Do something to occupy your mind."

Dan was mumbling incoherently to himself as he struggled to rise. He was saying over and over: "Shorty—Shorty—don't give up! Fight 'em, Shorty!" He had to force his eyes away from the agonized face under that celluloid window. He staggered to the door and blindly felt his way down the hall. His eyes were blurry.

The Inspector's door was open and he was sitting erect and pompous at his small desk. Before him was a ragged map. He was tracing something on it with a pencil as he looked up and saw Dan leaning against the door.

He scrutinized Dan's face for a moment in silence. Then he cleared his throat impressively.

"Well, young man," he said slowly, "I've been wanting to see you. Sit down. How's Shorty's temperature now?"

"A hundred and four and eight-tenths," Dan told him absently.

"What? Oh, I say! That's dreadful," he gasped and then smiled grimly, changing the subject. "You and I have work to do. Let's take up the first step of our plan of operations, eh?"

Dan merely nodded without replying.

"Our first difficulty is that the island has never been properly surveyed," began the Inspector. "I've got a map here but it doesn't show me what I want

to know. I want to see just what chance we've got, what defenses the enemy has prepared. What supplies he's getting in. His lines of communication."

"You sound like a West Point textbook on tactics," Dan remarked.

"Precisely, son. You'll know you've been to war, too, before we're finished. Well, how am I going to get this information? What kind of an airplane did you have, up there? Will it fly now?"

"I suppose it might," Dan said, "if we dig it out and repair it. It's a Lockheed Electra; a twin-motored transport. They use them for high-speed passenger runs back in the States. It has a ceiling of some thirty thousand, a top speed of two-fifty, and it's fully equipped for expedition work."

"Good," exulted the Inspector. "Now, I'm going to send four men up there with you. They'll help you dig your plane out, and repair it. Two of them will fly back here with you. The other two will proceed to a point opposite this island and establish a camp. That will be the basis for our operations."

"Please," begged Dan. "You don't know how heavily fortified that place is. Don't send men up there until you can protect them. Why, there's a high wall across the island. They've got machine guns."

"So? Well, get your plane. That's the first step. The trimotor we use is no good for this sort of thing. I'll see if I can borrow an aerial photographer from the Air Force, and we'll map if from the air. Then we'll know where to start. You'd better get ready

to leave at once. While you're gone, I'll radio for the aerial photographer."

It was a great relief for Dan to struggle into his bulky fur pants and parka again. The Inspector issued brisk instructions to the crew of the big trimotor, and Dan added a request for a set of airplane skis and tools to install them on the Electra's landing gear. Food was packed in thermos jugs and several big snow shovels were placed in the plane.

Early the following morning the three big motors were ticking over. The plane was loaded and ready to go. Dan paid a last-minute call at Shorty's bedside and found the doctor and the nurses jubilant.

"The fever broke about two o'clock this morning," the doctor said. "Temperature's down to a hundred and one, and still falling. He has passed the crisis. He'll be well again soon."

"Hooray!" shouted Dan. "That's all I need. I feel fine, now. When he wakes up tell him I'll soon be back with our plane."

"Good luck!" waved the nurses as Dan ran across the snow toward the waiting ship.

The big trimotor was one of those obsolete passenger planes used on the airlines when traffic first began to be heavy. It was not only several years old, but it was slow. It seemed to Dan, as the unwieldy ship droned on hour after hour, that he'd never get there. The distance was two hundred and forty miles—an hour's run for the Electra, but a wearisome two hours and a half for this transport.

Finally it began swinging in a wide circle, banking

around for a landing on the snow-covered ice. Down it came with a heaviness that brought Dan's heart into his mouth. It slapped its thick skis into the snow and coasted into the wind for a quarter of a mile before it stopped rolling. Then the Canadian Airways pilot who was flying it for the Mounties swung it around on the left motor and taxied it bumpily over the snow to the shore.

As soon as the plane stopped, all four Mounties leaped out and began flinging cables over the wings, driving spikes into the ice, lashing down the tail and tightening the cables over the wings. The pilot placed a bucket under each of the hot motors and drained the thick oil out. Then he covered each motor with a thick canvas shroud that hid even the propellers.

"That's the first thing to remember in Arctic flying," he explained. "Drain your oil. Lash down your ship. Cover your motors. In ten minutes these motors will be freezing cold. That oil will jelly up like glue. You never could start 'em. I suppose you forgot to take the oil out of your own motors. We'll probably have to tear 'em down and scrape it off."

"Wrong again," grinned Dan. "The oil is in a sealed can in the cabin."

"Aw," grunted the pilot, "somebody must have told you."

"Yeah," agreed Dan. "Common sense. Well, let's get busy on those shovels, men. The ship's down there about ten feet."

It was an all-day job. Dan labored with that

shovel until he thought he never could straighten his back again. The others didn't seem to notice it. They kept on, at a rhythmic pace, with no apparent effort. Toward evening they had the tail dug free, the wing uncovered, and were excavating the packed snow between the floats.

In the gloom of the Arctic evening, after the evening meal, the pilot began tugging at the canvas motor covers on the Electra's two big Wasp 900's. It was slow work, but in an hour or so he lugged them free and placed them on his own motors on the trimotor. The bigger, heavier covers were then transferred to the Wasps.

"What's that for?" Dan asked.

"These are special Arctic hoods," he said. "Notice that they have a sort of chute at the bottom coming down to the ground and fitting over a metal oil stove I have here. Now, we lace them up tight, see? Each one has a little round heater at the bottom. Now, I light these heaters. They'll send the heat up inside the hoods and warm the metal in the motors. It'll take several hours."

Dan watched intently. He was learning the technique of starting an airplane motor in a temperature of sixty below zero. That technique grew out of bitter experience. Men forced down on polar ice invented it, and a Canadian aeronautical engineer named MacDonough perfected it. Now explorers can always get off again if they have to land in the sub-zero cold of the Arctic wastes. This process saves their lives.

"But we don't start 'em now," he said. "That's the trick. We go to sleep now, and let 'em absorb this heat until morning."

Dan rolled up in a sleeping bag in the wind-free excavation they had dug out of the snow. It was comfortable there, and he slept like a log until morning, when the process was advanced another step.

"We'll have to melt some snow," the pilot said, "and splash water on this inclined ramp we've dug. That'll ice it, see? Then when we start the motors, she'll pull herself out of the hole under her own power. When we get her up here, we'll take off those floats and put on skis."

While the Mounties were icing the ramp, the pilot began pouring the heated oil into the Wasps' crankcases. He tried the propellers. He felt of the hot cylinders, to see if they'd absorbed enough heat. With the help of one of the Mounties he turned the propellers backward about twenty revolutions, forcing the oil up inside the cylinder walls.

Then he jerked aside the canvas hood on the right engine.

"Contact!" he roared. "Hurry up before it freezes again."

Dan snapped the switch, pumped the primer, cracked the throttle open a few notches. He kept his spark well retarded. He pressed the electric starter button. The propeller turned over about half a revolution and stuck.

"Where's your inertia starter crank?" shouted the pilot.

"Right there on the wing. All ready!" Dan answered.

They wound it up, while the rising whine of the inertia gears rose higher and higher. Then they stepped back.

"Contact!"

The great Wasp roared into life. Dan let it idle while a dense black smoke whipped back from the exhaust for a few seconds. Then it settled down to a purr. The same procedure followed with the left engine. Dan was watching his temperature needle. When the motor was thoroughly warmed, he signalled them to get clear.

He had his eyes on both tachometers to see that they were in perfect unison. He didn't want the ship to start sidewise when it climbed up into the wind-swept surface snow. Finally he gripped the twin throttle levers and eased them ahead. Nothing happened. The motors were straining, pulling. The whole ship was vibrating, its two motors roaring at full throttle. Finally one float broke loose. The ship swung sharply, but recovered when the other float twisted free. Up the inclined snow ramp came the Electra, to idle its motors while its floats were removed and the skis fastened in place.

The Mounties packed their bedding rolls into its cabin. The pilot emptied a fresh supply of gas into its tanks. Dan signalled that he was all set for the take-off.

The trimotor got away first, to give Dan an idea of the distance he would require. He watched it dis-

appear into a mere pin-point in the distance. Then he guided the Electra into the other ship's ski tracks, opened his throttles wide, and sent the plane skimming into the sky.

After the take-off, Dan could not resist the impulse to circle his former prison, the scene of such a narrow escape for both Shorty and himself. He dipped a wing in salute, and waved goodbye to the hole in the snow that had been his refuge. Then he recovered and set a course toward the distant haven of Hay River Post.

He seemed to be overtaking the trimotor too rapidly. There it was, just as he thought it would be, a pin-point against the windy horizon. But it leaped and bulged before his eyes. It became, not the Canadian Airways trimotor that he had just watched take off, but a huge all-metal biplane, with two motors mounted between the wings.

Varkofsky's private plane!

It swept toward him. It swooped low. Faces appeared at the cabin window. Dan instantly recognized the fierce bearded head of the master crook. He saw him gesture an order to the pilot. A gun barrel was thrust out into the windstream. It jerked and trembled.

A machine-gun! A row of holes appeared miraculously along the Electra's fuselage. Dan caught his breath, gunned both motors, and pulled the ship up in the fastest climb of his flying career. His hand was trembling on the throttles. He must escape!

Chapter XII

"WE MUST HAVE GUNS!"

As soon as the Electra began its swift climb, Dan's trapped feeling vanished. His super-speed ship could outfly the Russian biplane so badly that there was little danger from its guns unless Dan went hunting for it. And he had no intention of doing that.

What happened, as he discovered when he levelled off at twelve thousand feet, was that in jolting around on the snow he had taken off in the wrong direction and headed north. That had brought him over the island so suddenly that he had nearly collided with Varkofsky's plane as it was coming in for a landing.

His compass was completely dead. The long burial under the snow had congealed its liquid so that it wouldn't float properly. Luckily, Dan had an uncanny sense of direction. He followed the shoreline of Great Bear Lake due southward, passed over the LaBine workings and its nearby airport, flew on due south and finally overtook the trimotor.

When he landed at Hay River Post, Inspector Grosvenor was waiting outside, in his heavy furs, to see the ship come in. Before Dan had run out his gasoline line, the Inspector opened the transport's

door and came up the aisle to bend over him in the pilots' compartment. He wanted to see how the ship looked. He wanted a joy-ride in it, to get the feel of the Electra and see how it behaved in the air. So Dan took off again, circled the tiny little settlement and put the ship through its paces.

The Inspector didn't have much to say until they had landed again.

"Remarkable!" he exclaimed. "This is our first and most powerful weapon, lad. It can out-perform anything that Communist gang can get. With it, we can proceed to our first mission. I radioed to Edmondton for an aerial photographer, but, as usual, I was turned down. They said they haven't a man to spare. So they sent me up some photographic equipment and told me to do the job myself. It's all Greek to me."

Dan smiled.

"Well, Inspector," he replied, "Shorty Keenan can handle that camera very nicely. When he's ready to fly again, we'll map the island for you. Will you set up the darkroom so that we can do the developing as soon as we get back?"

"Of course. Shorty's well on the road to recovery. He should be able to do a bit of flying tomorrow. Let's ask him."

Shorty, sitting up in bed, was reading a three-months-old magazine when the pair entered.

"Oh, boy!" he burst out, when told of the work that had to be done. "Will I map that island for you? Will I? Just give me my fur pants. Where's my parka? I'll be ready in a jiffy."

"Not so fast," cautioned the doctor, smiling. "Give yourself a chance. You've gone through a very serious ordeal, my boy."

"Tomorrow will be time enough, if that's all right with you, doctor," the Inspector added.

"Why, I think so, if he takes care to keep warm and not subject himself to any more drafts."

Shorty promised. Dan, after a long, quiet visit in the sick-room with his haggard-looking friend, finally left with buoyant spirits to begin the work of setting up the darkroom and making ready for the photo flight. The Inspector followed, eager to learn some of the details of aerial photography. Together they repaired to a small adjoining room.

Inspector Grosvenor was silent as Dan explained the process. He examined the curious metal shell of the camera, and the air-tight cans of film. He raised his bushy white eyebrows in astonishment when Dan explained that the film was so amazingly sensitive that it must be kept on ice until the very last moment before the plane took off.

"Where did you boys learn all that?" he asked.

"Well," Dan answered, "my father has been using these cameras in exploration work for a good many years, Inspector. He developed some of these improvements himself. He has an aerial camera now that will make marvelous pictures from forty thousand feet—seven miles straight up."

"You don't mean it," burst out the Inspector.

"Oh, yes. This is a small one, as aerial cameras go. In the Arctic last year, my father used five of these instruments. There is only one such type of camera

in the world. It is used by the United States Army and Navy, the Canadian Air Force, and most foreign governments."

"Well," the Inspector remarked, fingering his white mustache, "I can't see yet how this thing can take a picture from eighteen thousand feet."

"We'll show you," Dan promised.

The flight itself seemed to Dan just a monotonous job to be done as soon as possible. He didn't like photographic flying, because he had to fly straight and level and had no freedom to indulge himself in the pure luxury of flying a speedy ship. The job was completed in about six hours, including the flight to the island and return. In the film cans he had recorded every square inch of territory in nearly a thousand square miles.

"Now," explained Dan, "after we print these negatives, I'll show you the rest of the trick."

He had prepared a large table, with pins at various points. With a pencil he had drawn the outlines of the island, to scale. The finished prints were trimmed, and cut, and fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle. When they were finally in position, they were glued to a stiff cardboard backing. Finally the entire island, the strait separating it from the shore, and many miles of the shore-line were all fitted together into one large map. It was accurately scaled, so that the Inspector could determine the exact distance from one point to another.

"Wonderful!" responded the Inspector. "Why, I can even see the men moving around down there."

Rapidly, Dan explained the buildings on the island, pointed out the two narrow-gauge tracks entering the tunnel's mouth, and the other features of the place.

The Inspector's mind was working fast. He barked out orders, called for the entire force of Mountie constables to look at the map. They held a worried conference over the table all afternoon.

Finally the Inspector sat down at his desk and began making some notes in a loose-leaf book.

"It's suicide to attack that wall," he said. "It wouldn't do us any good to flank it and bear down on their rear, either. They'd cut us off from getting back to our base. I think our best bet is to establish a small camp here," he concluded, indicating a point on the mainland about a mile from the strait.

"Then what?" one of the Mounties asked.

"We'll camp there, if we can keep down and out of sight. When one of their airplanes tries to take off, or land, we'll bring it down by rifle fire. In that way we'll cut off their supplies and starve 'em out."

There was silence. The Inspector looked at Dan inquiringly.

"Think that would work?" he asked.

"No, sir," Dan replied. "I don't. They have enough food there to last a long time. Their airplanes are armed, and they'd return that rifle fire. They'd swoop down over you and wipe you out."

"Hang it all!" exclaimed the Inspector, jumping to his feet and pacing the room. "This is almost hopeless. A military operation of this size requires

guns . . . battalions of troops . . . bombing planes. What can I do, cooped up here with eight men? Nothing."

"May I make a suggestion, Inspector?" asked one of the Mounties.

"Certainly, Grogan, my boy."

"The Inspector's right," Grogan told the group. "We are licked before we start. No use sending us up there to certain death. I say we should send a demand to the Territorial Government at Edmondton for their full strength of airplanes. They've plenty of bombers there, sir. They've all kinds of pursuit ships, modern machine guns, supplies. Surely they can't ask the Inspector to undertake a hopeless job like this after they've seen this aerial map."

The Inspector looked from one face to another sadly.

"That's what we should do, of course," he admitted. "But I ask you men to consider me. Such a thing would undoubtedly ruin my career. You see, in order to comply with that request, the Territorial Governor must communicate with the Dominion Government at Ottawa. Those planes are merely stationed there for instruction and practice purposes. They all belong to Canada, not to the provinces."

"Yes, but——"

"You must remember," the Inspector went on, "that we have no militia here such as each State has below the border. This would become a serious national crisis if we called for troops and airplanes. It would require, first, that we declare martial law, suspend all courts, all local government bodies, and

rule by the force of the sword. You can imagine what would happen throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan if we did that.

"It would involve the whole Dominion in rioting, protests, fights. It would center the attention of the whole world on this crook up there. It might bring Russia into the affair and create a dangerous international situation."

That fearful statement produced another long silence.

Every man in the room could see the horrible possibilities of it, after the Inspector had explained it. They understood, now, why it was their own fight and why they dared not drag Canada into it.

"Besides, gentlemen," the Inspector finished, "I'd be drummed out of the Service. I'd be the goat. You see, it's really our own fault that the situation became so advanced; that these criminals were allowed to establish an armed fortress here. We should have prevented it."

There was little more to be said. Dan Perry saw clearly enough that the Inspector and each of his friendly young men was caught in a vise. The problem before them: the job of capturing Varkofsky and ridding the Northwest of his gangster outlaws, was certain suicide. But to run away, to confess their own failure to prevent the gang from gaining a foothold, and ask for help—that would be unthinkable.

"Well," sighed the Inspector, "I suggest that we send a party out and establish the camp anyway. That will give us a close check on Varkofsky's movements, and tell us what he's doing from day to day."

Dan smiled, in gratitude. He was thankful.

"I wish you'd count me as one of the Mounties, Inspector," he said. "And Shorty, too. We want to be part of this wonderful outfit. We want to help all we can."

"All right," nodded the Inspector, "it's a bargain. We need every bit of help we can get. From now on you're Constable Perry, and Shorty is Contable Keenan. You're under Sergeant Grogan's detachment. And your first assignment is to fly this advance guard up there to our new base and help them establish camp, and then fly back here."

"Yes, sir," Dan replied.

Once again the sleek Electra was rolled out on the snow-packed field, motors ticking over, while its streamlined cabin was packed to the door with food, tents, sleeping bags, radio equipment and a host of other supplies. Dan was at the controls; Shorty sat beside him in the co-pilot's seat with a pair of earphones under his fur hood. Their two-way radio would keep them in constant touch with the transmitter at the little Mountie outpost.

The super-speed ship lifted heavily from the snow and headed north. In an hour it was circling for a landing high up on the shore of Great Bear Lake, a few miles above the island where its motors would not be heard by Varkofsky's guards. Then Dan and Shorty set to work helping Sergeant Grogan erect his tents and put a small short wave transmitter on the air.

The Mounties seemed to be perfectly at home in this terrific howling gale, moving about in the bone-

chilling, sixty-below cold that stung their faces and whipped eddies of frozen snow into their eyes and mouths. They were big, broad-shouldered men. In their heavy fur garments they looked like polar bears. But they went calmly about the business of establishing camp, without any apparent discomfort. Years and years of Arctic patrol work had hardened them to it. They stalked down the guy wires of their radio mast, and tried for communication with their base. Sergeant Grogan stuck his bearded face into a microphone while Constable MacNeill turned a big crank which spun a generator through a system of gears. Grogan said: "Hello! Hello! Hello!" persistently and patiently, while the operator at Hay River was tuning his dials on his receiver. Finally Grogan got an answer.

"Well, it's about time, ye lazy galoot," he barked. "Report the camp's established. All quiet. Airplane about to return."

"Come on, Shorty," Dan said. "Let's be on our way."

"Well, I would, ye crazy tenderfoot, if I had any guns," Grogan roared. He turned to the others. "That operator says why don't I just go on over and tell this Russky he's under arrest."

"If we had any guns," Dan repeated. "We must have guns! Not the Mounties' rifles, but machine guns! Plenty of 'em!"

There was a sullen roar in the sky. Varkofsky's big transport was returning to the island from a trip to the coast with radium concentrate. It settled slowly behind the irregular shore-line, vanishing be-

hind the fringe of scrubby trees that lay silent and snow-covered along the lake.

"That's the only place I know of," Dan told Shorty. "There are plenty of machine-guns on that island. Everything we need."

"Let's get some," Shorty whispered. "Let's beat Varkofsky with his own guns!"

Chapter XIII

DAN'S DARING PLAN

DAN'S first thought, upon hearing Shorty's wild idea, was to snort in derision. "Beat Varkofsky with his own guns!" It sounded very nice. It was like that old fable about the mice putting the bell on the cat. The only trouble with that marvelous idea was that the mouse conference couldn't find any of their members with nerve enough to do the job.

He dismissed Shorty's suggestion from his mind, and turned back to the Mounties to see if he could be of any help. He found he was just in time to sit down to a meal consisting of vegetables, bread, oatmeal and tea—all prepared on a Primus stove, that little marvel of expedition equipment without which most polar exploration would be impossible.

Dan ate his portion carefully, enjoying it with the prodigious appetite which extreme cold always produces. Shorty, he noticed, was doing likewise. The Mounties were gossiping among themselves, joking with Sergeant Grogan about going over to the island and arresting Varkofsky for trespass. All of them were in good humor.

Suddenly Dan's keen ears picked up an alien sound. He listened to it for a moment, and then pulled his fur hood over his face. He bent down and wriggled

his body through the circular opening in the windproof tent. Outside, he heard it more plainly. It was an approaching airplane.

The others had heard it, too.

"Outside, quick!" bellowed Sergeant Grogan. "It's an air raid!"

Everybody started running as far from their tents as they could, in different directions. Shorty and Dan legged it for their plane, but then turned at right angles and dove deep into a snowbank. There was no time to get the great Electra into the air. Varkofsky's vengeance was striking from the air.

Even while the men were running for cover, the big all-metal biplane came swooping down with a rising scream, its machine-gun stuttering a warning of swift death. Down over the camp in a power dive it roared, then up and around for another try. Again the vicious ship thundered down upon them. A straight line of red-hot bullets plowed into the snow all around them. Dan and Shorty burrowed under the snow for concealment, and lifted their heads to see what damage had been done.

As the ship came swooping low in its third power dive, Dan saw Sergeant Grogan lying in the snow following the ship's flight with his rifle sights. The great biplane pulled up not two hundred feet above their heads, and banked around for another attack.

Grogan's rifle barked. The boys could see his shoulder jerk under the recoil as he lay prone in the snow. As the big Russian biplane banked in a climbing turn, it appeared to wobble in the air. Then it

recovered, and roared away toward the guarded island.

"Winged him!" shouted Constable MacNeill with glee. "Bet you hit him fair amidships, Sergeant. You drove the bloke to cover, anyway."

"A good rifle, that," muttered the Sergeant, climbing to his feet. "I wish to thunder it was a machine-gun. He was fair over our heads."

"How much damage did they do?" Dan wondered, aloud.

"Don't know," Shorty grunted. "Let's get to the plane first."

"Those cowardly, sneaking thieves," roared Dan, shaking his fist at the fast-retreating plane. "I'll get 'em! I'll find a way yet! I want a machine-gun! I want a gun just like the one they had in that plane."

"Why don't you go over to Varkofsky's place and borrow it?" Constable Graham chuckled.

"All right," shouted Dan, trembling with rage. "You don't think I can do it, do you? Well, just watch me."

"For Heaven's sake, lad," burst out MacNeill. "He was only jokin'."

"Well, I'm not," stormed Dan. "If I don't get it, we'll all be shot up like this every few hours. Why, they'll massacre the lot of us."

"The plane seems to be all right," Shorty reported, after a hasty glance. "She took a few slugs through the right wing, but not near the motors. They didn't hit any wing tanks, or controls. She'll fly."

"Then you'd better crank it up and get out of

here," Grogan said. "As long as that plane's around here, they know where we are. It's a big target. They can see it. It draws their fire."

"I guess you're right," Dan admitted. "I'll go, because I don't want to expose you men to any more attacks. But I'm not going back to the base. You tell the Inspector that, will you?"

"Now look here," warned the Sergeant. "I hope you don't take Graham's idle talk seriously. I don't have to warn you about making any silly attempt to get on that island. You'll be caught, and killed."

Dan was fastening his felt gauntlets over his mittened hands. He was standing beside the plane, as Shorty held the door open. His mouth was clamped shut; lips drawn flat in a firm, determined line.

"Well, I'm going anyhow," he retorted. "I'm going after a machine gun. Since you Mounties can't seem to get any of them for yourselves, I'm going to get one for you. And I'll bring it back, too."

He stepped inside the cabin and slammed the door shut. Before the Sergeant could reach him to make any more protests, the twin Wasps roared into life, and the propeller blast drowned out his howls as the plane swept aloft.

In the air, with his own radio transmitter in action, he called the operator at Hay River Post and reported to the Inspector directly. He knew that the hardened old veteran would hold Sergeant Grogan responsible in case anything happened to him. And he wanted to halt that sort of thing. He left a message as to his plans, and said it was his own idea.

Then they landed the great ship a few miles inland,

staked it down to some trees, went through the whole elaborate process of draining oil, and making ready for a long stay.

Dan arrived at the shore-line, and saw in the dim distance the faint glow of lights against the black sky. That was the island. That was his goal. He turned and shook hands with Shorty ruefully.

"Well," he said, "if I don't come back, you know what to do."

"Yeah," Shorty said, shortly. "I know. I wonder if the fool-killer is taking a vacation tonight. Anyhow, good luck, you mug. I'll be waiting."

Dan raised his gauntlet hand in a gesture of farewell, and started across the wind-swept ice.

Shorty watched him until he was out of sight. Then he unpacked his pup tent and pitched camp right there, in the snow. Dan plodded onward.

In an hour he had gained the island's shore. He avoided any contact with the wall, which might tell the sentry above of his presence. Carefully, silently, totally invisible in the shrieking blizzard, he edged along up the wall and peered around the end to see what unexpected sentry might be within view.

As Dan had expected, the log cabins' warmth was more attractive to the guards than walking post in a sub-zero blizzard. They had discounted the possibility of any human being's approach in this sort of weather. Dan raced across the dim patch of light coming from the street and halted at the door of the barrack. It was not locked.

Peering inside, he saw a strange figure sitting in a chair on guard duty at the barred door leading to the

bunkhouse space. He wondered what had happened to his friend Mike.

This guard was fast asleep, sitting back in his chair. He had the two front legs up off the floor and the back of it resting against the wall. His feet were dangling, his head was hanging down on his chest, and has arms were folded across his fat stomach. He'd probably sleep that way for hours, unless some higher official came stalking in and kicked the chair out from underneath him.

The plan that gradually took shape in Dan's mind was a daring one. He crouched outside in the shadow, silently weighing his chances of succeeding at it. It might have one chance in ten of succeeding, and then only if each step were timed perfectly. They all had to dovetail together, and if the timing of any part was late the whole plot would fail. That would leave Dan exposed, surrounded, and hopelessly in the power of Varkofsky.

Dan was afraid of it, but he had come this far and he would have to go on. Whenever he thought of those three Mounties exposed to airplane fire from a machine-gun, he instantly forgot his fears. He must succeed at any cost.

He opened the door again and worked his body inside. He closed the door. It was now or never. As silently as he could with his thick boots, Dan pulled the door open and crossed the floor. Before the guard awoke, Dan pulled his loaded automatic pistol from the guard's holster and transferred it to his own pocket. Then he swung out his foot, kicked away the chair, and as the guard fell to the floor on his back, Dan leaped astride him and swung a murderous

uppercut that landed flush on the astounded man's jaw. He slumped on the floor, and straightway went to sleep again.

There had been a mild clatter as the chair slid over backward. This sound was sufficient to arouse every Indian captive in the barracks. Before Dan had struggled to his feet again, the barred enclosure was jammed with tense brown faces. Dan slipped back his hood to disclose his face. He searched the faces for his friend Little Bear.

Finally he located him. He explained in his poor French that the Mounties had arrived. The Mounties! They had always been the Indian's friends, Little Bear said. Dan went on as rapidly as he could, explaining that help was here, that the Mounties were coming to take Varkofsky and all his gang prisoner. The Indians sighed with relief, and broke out among themselves in a rapid, gesturing flow of their own dialect. Dan could see that they were pleased. It was the first ray of hope they had had since Varkofsky had imprisoned them.

Little Bear came to the fore again and quietly asked questions.

How could they get out? What provision was being made for protecting them during the battle that they knew was coming? Was there any way they could help?

"Yes," Dan said, in a whisper. "You Malemute braves must not let anything happen to arouse suspicion. You must go back to sleep now. In the morning you must go to work as usual, with no outward sign of having seen me. You must take your positions inside the tunnel.

"Then, when you hear shots fired, you must overpower your guards and seize their weapons. Tie them up and lock them in the tunnel."

That was easy, Little Bear said. They now had great gates across the mouth of the tunnel to keep the weather out. They had to open and close the gates to allow the little train of ore cars to come in and out. They were made of thick slabs of spruce trees, several inches thick. The tunnel could accommodate them all, Little Bear said, with relish.

"Now, remember," Dan said, in caution. "The Mounties will deal with these crooks. You must not start any war of your own. Your job is to round up these guards, so that we may then proceed to take the leaders captive and drive them through the gates. If we see that such a thing is impossible, we must try for escape ourselves across the ice, where the Mounties are waiting to protect you."

"You here," Little Bear gestured, "Mounties there, us in between. "Can do. Indians will not reveal plan until we hear shot."

"All right," Dan replied. "Go back to sleep now. I'll put this fat guard back where he was, and he won't know anything about it when he wakes up. He'll think he dreamed it, until he looks for his gun."

The faces withdrew from the barred door and Dan moved off.

As he sought out a place of safety, Dan wondered whether or not the Indians could hear a shot fired, through that heavy door across the mouth of the tunnel. That would be one of the many chances he would have to take. In the meantime, he had other jobs to do.

The first was to locate the island's arsenal, and its supply of machine-guns.

Creeping softly through the darkness, Dan darted from shadow to shadow, from one log-cabin building to another. From his previous experience on the island he had a general idea of each building, and its purpose. He drew on that knowledge now, to help his memory. Which one was the arsenal? Where were those guns?

He found himself on the chief street, with cabins for the officials at each side and the long, important-looking headquarters building in the dominating position at the end.

There it is, he told himself in a whisper. He dared hardly think aloud. It must be there. That building must house the island's supply of guns. How might he get one? How could he find his way inside it, guarded as it must be?

He was a prisoner on this island again, he thought grimly. He would be hunted down and shot as soon as any one of Varkofsky's hundred men knew he was near. His life wasn't worth much, as long as he was within gun-range of this fortified place.

Abruptly he put the gloomy thoughts out of his head and waded through the deep snowdrifts to the end of the long building. He tried to peer through the cloudy glass. There wasn't enough light. He couldn't see.

Suddenly he was caught, and held, in the glaring white light of the giant searchlight. Without warning it had split the darkness, aimed straight at him. Dan stood by the window, frozen with horror.

Chapter XIV

THE FIRST ATTEMPT

DAN'S first instinct was to duck. He threw himself into the snow, wormed his way on his stomach around the corner of the building, and then stood up, torn between the impulse to make a run for it, and to come out into the glare with his hands up.

They'd find him sooner or later, he knew. This was an island, and a guarded one, at that. He had no possible chance to escape now. But as he stood there, heart beating wildly and panting like an exhausted runner, he fingered his two pistols and decided on a show-down.

Let them find him. He hurried down the rear of the building and cut across an open space toward the dimly-seen outlines of the airplane hangar. As he approached, it too sprang into light. Roof lights showed its gracefully-curved truss roof. Even the runway lights were on. The lighted wind tee was whipping and trembling in the Arctic gale. Dan threw himself down into the snow again as he saw some sleepy figures crossing the floor of the hangar to open the great doors.

Varkofsky himself, roused out of a sound sleep, came marching along the narrow path to the hangar like an angry bear. He passed within ten feet of the

spot where Dan was hidden. Before he had arrived at the hangar, Dan heard a motor high above, and the laboring, straining sound of an airplane in trouble. This pilot, whoever he was, saw that in addition to his other troubles he would have to land cross-wind, side-slipping down at a dangerous angle and then kicking around just in the nick of time to set his skis down in the snow. Even then, the cross-wind nearly upset him before he could taxi into the hangar.

Dan edged up around the corner of the hangar to listen. He saw that the newcomer was a single-motor cabin job of the type that prospectors fly throughout Canada. It was a staunch, rugged little ship, not particularly speedy but capable of taking a lot of hard banging.

As the pilot opened the cabin door and climbed out, Varkofsky barked:

"Where is the ammunition? I expected you at midnight, my friend. Here it is three o'clock. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Listen, boss," waved the pilot, wearily, "you're lucky I got here at all. This blizzard is nothing to fool with. I should have played safe and stayed at Ft. Norman until it dies down."

Varkofsky flung out a heavy hand and delivered a back-handed cuff to the pilot's mouth. He shrank away from it, but was silent.

"I do the thinking for this organization, you Yankee upstart. And you fly when I tell you to, without comment. Is that clear?"

The pilot nodded, wiped some blood off his lips, and glared.

"What did they say at Ft. Norman?" boomed Varkofsky, in a sly tone.

"Nothin'. They haven't wised up yet. They heard about the kids being found alive in their plane, but I guess the kids didn't talk. The place is full of Mounties, but none of 'em knew anything about us."

"The kids did talk," snapped Varkofsky. "But that wily old Mountie Inspector kept the thing quiet. He's afraid to send a force against us because he knows he'll get 'em killed. He's got two or three men now, up the lake a few miles, supposed to be spying on us. You know what the answer to that is, don't you?"

"A machine gun?" leered the pilot. His lips twisted into a crooked smile. Dan, who had felt deeply sorry for him up to that time, recoiled from that leering grimace.

"Your plane will be needed here, my friend," chuckled Varkofsky. "We tried out a raid on their camp, but my big plane is too cumbersome for attack work. We cannot manouver it fast enough. We inflicted some damage, I believe. My pilot says he killed one and wounded the rest. But we must attack at dawn tomorrow with this ship. Wipe them out."

"Okay," nodded the pilot. "I brought some Browning synchronized guns that our Chicago agent bought off the Air Corps at a sale. Pretty soft, eh, boss? Perfectly legal. They fire a thousand rounds a minute. And I got a dozen cases of ammunition belts, all loaded and ready to go."

"Ah," commented Varkofsky, rubbing his hands together. "At last you are showing signs of intelli-

gence. Well, my men will service your ship and get two of these guns mounted. You come with me. I'll order a bunk prepared for you in my quarters. You've earned some sleep."

The great searchlight snapped off. The runway lights vanished. The hangar lights went out, too. The party threaded its way through the narrow path to the headquarters building.

So those guns were imported for the purpose of murdering Sergeant Grogan and his two Mounties, where they? Well, Dan told himself grimly, they certainly wouldn't be used for that. Before the sleepy hangar crew got around to closing the doors, Dan slipped inside and concealed himself back of a wing crate. He silently thanked his father for having tutored him in every branch of aviation including gunnery. He knew a few things about guns.

Presently a single light went on and the hangar crew started to unpack the crates of guns. In an hour or so the mounting was completed and the coiled belts were loaded in their compartments, lying there like rattlesnakes gleaming wickedly from thousands of sharp steel points in the harsh light.

When the job was completed, one mechanic moved the propeller over by hand to synchronize the gears so the guns would fire through the propeller arc. This was accomplished by adjusting a small knob on the oil chamber which worked the guns. They were mounted on the nose of the ship, outside the cabin, and released by clamping a lever on the control stick. This, in turn, allowed a power impulse to travel through a tube of oil and work the trigger mechanism.

Dan simply drained all the oil out of the synchronizing gear, after the mechanics were asleep. To all appearances, the guns were ready for use. They were intact, the loaded belts coiled and ready, but in the air the pilot would clutch his gun trip in vain. Nothing would happen.

And when he came back to the island, the guns would not be harmed. Those were the guns that Dan was planning to use on his own plane against this criminal pilot.

Dawn, such as it was, came several hours later. In the Arctic, in mid-winter, there is never enough sun to illuminate the wastes with the brightness of daylight. By this time Dan was safely concealed near the tunnel mouth, waiting for the right time to signal for the uprising.

He saw preparations for the day's work begin. He saw the Indians file out of the mess-hall in their fur hoods and start moving slowly toward the mouth of the tunnel. Not by a single gesture did they betray Dan's secret. The great doors of the tunnel entrance opened, and closed after them.

Steam came pluming out of the exhaust stack in the crushing mill. Dan's ears heard the regular grinding whirr of the big crushers. The tunnel door opened and a line of cars was hauled outside, behind the big Deisel engine that Shorty used to drive. One of Varkofsky's guards was driving it now. It was beyond the Indians' ability.

Dan saw the big hangar doors open and the fur-clad mechanics push the small plane out on the line. He shuddered again. He had no way of knowing

whether or not they had discovered and repaired the oil lines on those guns.

As soon as the plane had taken off, and was safely out of sight, Dan knew the time was at hand. When the tunnel doors opened again to admit the line of cars, Dan Perry leaped from his hiding place and jumped up behind the driver of the Deisel.

"Don't move," he snapped, "or you'll get it in the back. Drive inside. Shut the doors."

Trembling, the guard obeyed. As soon as the doors were closed, Dan shouted to the Indians.

"Now," he yelled. "Get 'em! Line 'em up here!"

It was like a magic call to arms. More than sixty Indians, screaming and whooping, surrounded the dazed guards, lined them up against the wall of the tunnel and lashed them securely to the timbers. Then, the guards were gagged with rags torn from their own shirts.

Whooping and shouting at the top of their lungs, the Indians piled into the ore cars. Dan freighted them outside, closed the tunnel doors, and came clattering down the narrow-guage track toward the crusher mill. Here the Indians leaped off and began overpowering the mill crew. By this time, the alarm was out.

Sentries were running in confusion up and down the street, shooting at any moving thing they saw. Dan went galloping across the clearing toward the hangar as soon as he heard the approaching motor of the small cabin job. He'd certainly have a battle on his hands, now!

The hangar crew was down in the war-torn street,

fighting those crazed Indians with the futile, crazed fear that had overtaken everybody. Dan had a clear field with the big all-metal trimotor. He smashed its motors, bent its propellers, ripped out ignition wiring, did a thorough job of sabotage while the cabin plane was slipping in for a landing. He found a Thompson sub-machine gun inside the biplane—the one that had been used against the Mounties the day before. With this clutched in his two fists, he stepped behind the hangar door and waited.

Sounds of battle came to his ears, then the pungent smell of smoke. The Indians were burning the buildings. Dan couldn't stop to worry about that now. The cabin plane had landed and was sliding up to the hangar door. The pilot climbed out and strode inside, all ready to start an argument about what had happened to his guns. Dan saw that the fuselage was full of bullet holes, and that the coiled, snake-like belts still remained unspent in the ammunition chambers. Grimly amused, Dan noted how harsh anger turned the pilot's face livid, how he moved toward the doorway, ready to pounce on the nearest mechanic.

"All right, there!" Dan suddenly shot out and drove the sub-machine gun into his ribs. "Get 'em up. Turn around. Walk straight toward the back wall."

"W-w-who are you?" stammered the astonished pilot.

"Never mind; do as I tell you," Dan retorted, giving him a vicious dig in the back with the gun. "You're going back to the States for trial."

"What? No. You can't do that. I'll fight extradition. You'll never get me back there alive."

"Just as you say," retorted Dan. "You'll go back in a box, then. But I won't argue, see? Stand with your face to the wall. Now, put your hands above your head."

The man obeyed, sullenly. Dan put down the gun on the concrete floor and stooped to pick up the length of rope he had placed there for the job of tying him up.

As soon as the pilot heard that gun rumble on the floor, he whirled, lifting his booted foot in a kick that caught Dan in the ribs. With a howl, Dan crouched over in agony. The pilot followed that by leaping on him and driving a fist into Dan's face that snapped his head back.

Dan hit the floor on his back, the breath knocked out of him. He saw the murderous gleam in the man's eyes as he lifted that booted foot to drive it again into his helpless body. As it came down, Dan managed somehow to roll out from beneath it, and seize the man's leg with both his arms. Struggling for balance, the pilot came down with a thud and wriggled in an effort to free himself.

Fighting for breath in his lungs, Dan threw one of his fur-clad legs out and upset his enemy again. He managed to claw for a hand-hold around his chest. Dan's other foot came free. With both feet he got a scissor hold around the man's body and pressed his legs together while his enemy yelled and threshed his arms in pain.

Dan increased the pressure. He strained his lungs,

gasping. He rubbed his abdomen to force air into his body. Slowly his breath returned. He released the grip and swung a heavy blow to the pilot's head.

He heard the man's body hit the concrete, then he was up, facing Dan. They grappled, sparring for an opening. The man swung an uppercut, but Dan ducked and caught him with a stinging left hook that sent him reeling. As he sprawled backward, his hands closed around the wrecking bar that the hangar crew had left on a partly-opened case of guns. He threw it.

It came sailing past Dan's head, as he smashed inside the pilot's guard and pounded him with lefts and rights. The man's fist caught Dan in the eye; he staggered back, but charged in again. His head was spinning, and his breath was almost gone. Once more an eager, merciless light gleamed in the pilot's eyes as he waded in, swinging back his left arm for a killing blow. Dan rocked on his heels and took it on the shoulder.

Dan weaved as his enemy charged again, and caught him squarely on the jaw with a terrific hook that had every ounce of his weight behind it. The man seemed to go limp. He collapsed and sank to the floor with a groan.

Gasping and straining for breath, swallowing what seemed to be a wad of cotton in his mouth, Dan fumbled for the length of rope. In a few motions he had his enemy securely bound, and tied to a hangar column.

He staggered outside, rubbing his swollen eye and

taking in the icy air with deep breaths. Flames from the burning barrack were crackling and leaping skyward. The Indians were using guns now—captured rifles that they had ripped out of the cases in the arsenal.

When they saw Dan, they surrounded him and chanted encouragingly. They lugged him at a half-trot back into the headquarters building, and piled ammunition cases into his arms. He directed them to grab up all the rifles they could carry, but to send two men to the airplane hangar.

Back at the scene of the fight, Dan pointed breathlessly to the partly-opened cases of airplane machine guns, and ammunition. With their arms full, some of the Indians dropped their loot and took up the heavy airplane guns.

"Follow me," croaked Dan, and headed for the gate.

The biting gale was stinging their faces. The dim, murky light that filtered through the incessant gale seemed like something ghostly and unreal to Dan. But he struggled onward, leading his Indian party straight toward the haven of shore. They had saved his life. He must save theirs.

It seemed they had traveled hours, so slow was their progress. Yet they kept on, with each Indian clinging to the hand of the one ahead to avoid separation under the lashing storm.

There they were, strung out in a long line, working their way slowly and painfully toward safety. The thought occurred to Dan that if there were any gun-

ners on the island who could mount the wall, this line of crawling men would make a wonderful machine-gun target.

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than a distant stuttering broke out from the island. Somebody else had the same idea! Bullets were whistling around their feet, singing past their heads.

"Down, everybody!" Dan directed. "Flat on the ice!"

Chapter XV

THE MOUNTIES IN DANGER

LYING there on the ice, every muscle tense and rigid, jaws clamped tight, Dan Perry expected at any moment to feel the jarring, stinging impact of a bullet.

Behind him, his Indians were already giving themselves up for dead. They lay quietly at Dan's command, expecting like their leader that none of them would reach shore alive.

"Pass the word along," Dan told Little Bear after a short interval. "Pass it down the line. We're going to try again. We're going to crawl on our stomachs the rest of the way. At my signal, we'll start. Tell 'em."

In a hoarse whisper, Little Bear commanded the Indian behind him as Dan had ordered. Dan allowed plenty of time for the word to reach the end of the line, and then started ahead, wriggling flat on the ice like some awkward species of walrus.

Slowly—so slowly that Dan's impetous nature rebelled against it, they crawled along that ice. One yard after another, then a few moments' rest, and again that grunting, panting, groaning behind him to indicate that the line was moving.

What a motion-picture film that would make!

Dan regretted that his camera was still in Seward with the rest of his baggage. He wished he could have a record of it, a photograph of the fifty courageous Indians clinging to life by the barest margin, wriggling their way across this ice in a last, desperate attempt to survive. They were probably in a serpentine line by this time, but they had sense enough not to jump up and try to make a run for it. That would bring them into the gunsights of this killer on the high wall, back there on the island.

A hundred yards. Two hundred. They kept going, a few inches at a time while the gale howled and moaned about their freezing bodies. And not one of them had abandoned his precious load of guns and ammunition. Not a single man thought of giving up.

But the wind was dying down, and Dan knew that in a few minutes he would be exposed to sight again. The shore-line was visible, now, and he was debating whether to jump up and run for it. Before he made up his mind he saw the snow-covered bushes tremble along the shore. He saw a rifle barrel extended, to freeze motionless in a careful, steady aim.

Silently he motioned to Little Bear to pass the word to lie still. That gun might be lined up on them. It might belong to one of Varkofsky's men who had circled them on the ice and lay waiting to head them off.

The rifle exploded. A bullet whistled harmlessly over their heads. Then another, and another. The rifle was firing slowly, but carefully. It didn't seem

to move a quarter of an inch. Somebody was holding it as steady as a rock.

Then the bushes opened and the fur hood of Sergeant Grogan's parka rose up into view. He was scratching his scrubby chin and grinning.

"All right, Dan," he roared, delightedly. "You can come in now. That gunner won't bother you any more. A good rifle, this."

"Grogan," cried Dan, jumping up. "Where'd you come from?"

"Been here for quite a few minutes," he said. "I heard that machine gun quite a ways up the lake. So we came a-runnin'. We started for here as soon as we saw that smoke from over yonder. What happened?"

Dan was up, waving to the Indians to hurry toward the shore. As fast as they could, they gained the safety of the bushes and piled their guns and ammunition in the snow. Dan explained, sketchily, what had happened on the island.

Grogan, listening open-mouthed, slapped his knee.

"Boys, this is what I've been waiting for," he roared. "It's the first possible chance we've had. I don't know how you did it, but you've given the Mounties the advantage. Graham!"

"Yes, Sergeant?"

"Start pitching camp right here. MacNeill!"

"Here, Sergeant."

"Raise the base on your radio. Get in touch with the Inspector immediately. Dan, unpack a case of ammunition."

Turning to Little Bear, Sergeant Grogan erupted in a rapid flow of Malemute dialect. It seemed to ripple gracefully in liquid, many-vowelled syllables from his lips. The effect on the Indians was like a bolt of lightning.

They grabbed supplies and began arranging them in a line. Others helped Graham with the tent guys and camp equipment. Still others found snow shovels in the cabin of Dan's plane and hurriedly began digging in and throwing the snow up in front of them to form hurried defenses.

"Dan," ordered Sergeant Grogan, "I want you and Shorty to start heating your oil and getting your plane ready to fly. We may need it any minute."

"All right," nodded Dan. "Come on, Shorty. What's the plan, Sergeant?"

"They'll be over here in a minute," Grogan explained. "They aren't going to take this lying down. They'll send out as big a party as they can spare from the fire-fighting job over there."

"Yes?"

"Well, they'll get about half-way over, and we'll open fire with the Thompson guns in those cases, and drive 'em back. My job is to keep them bottled up on the island until we can get more help here."

"Why the airplane?" Shorty asked.

"Why, can't you see that they'll go flyin' straight for that ship of theirs out in the Gulf of Alaska? They'll bring back more men, more guns. They'll bring anything they can to wipe us out."

"I see," answered Dan. "Shorty, while that oil's heating and the motors are warming under those

hoods, we'll mount those two fixed airplane guns. We'll be ready for action if one of their planes takes off."

"Hurry it up," barked the Sergeant. "All ready with the radio, Mac? Give me the microphone. Hello! Hello! Sergeant Grogan reporting, Inspector. Beg to report that Dan got back safely from the island after all. Yes, sir. He brought back fifty Malemute Indians with him."

There was a long silence while the Inspector recovered from the shock. Grogan seemed to be enjoying it.

"That's not all, Inspector. The Indians set fire to the buildings over there, and in the confusion they all came back here with their arms full of guns and ammunition. We've got a pile of it—machine guns and all!"

He had to stop again while the Inspector's blood pressure was returning to normal. Then he brusquely got down to the business of the call.

"I want food for these Indians. I want men. I request that you draft every Mountie you can from the outlying detachments around Hay River, and fly 'em here at once. We're out in the open now, and we've got to take advantage of the start Dan gave us. We can lick 'em now, sir, if we can match 'em man for man. But we've got to hurry before they reach us."

He listened intently to the Inspector's words.

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I'll do that. I'll be ready. Goodbye."

He grinned, and rubbed his brushy chin again.

"This'll be the biggest fight the Northwest Territories ever saw," he exulted. "All ready with those guns, men? Deploy the Indians behind the ice breastworks and give 'em rifles. Hurry up with the plane, boys."

Grogan crouched down on one knee behind the blocks of ice and heaps of packed snow piled among the shore bushes. He saw that the Indians were lined up with loaded rifles, already aimed. He turned to MacNeill and directed that the radio set be packed up and removed to a place of safety.

It was hard on every man's nerves, waiting for the attack Grogan knew was coming. Shorty was rasping a small hack-saw through the thin metal of the Electra's nose, and that grinding noise added to the nervous strain. Dan was busy refilling the motors with oil, and testing the motor blocks for temperature. Finally he removed the hoods, started the motors and let them idle slowly while he helped Shorty with the guns.

Dan had to stop the motors to adjust the synchronizing gear, and then start them again. These guns would not fire through the propeller arc, but they had to be connected with the motors as a source of power.

He and Shorty were sitting in the control compartment, waiting for the signal to take off. Ahead of them, the hurriedly-constructed Mountie defenses looked as if a good stiff wind would blow them over, but Dan had confidence in Grogan's ability as a commander.

While they were waiting, Shorty began asking questions.

"I don't get this yet," he said. "I don't see why Inspector Grosvenor doesn't send about five hundred men up here and capture that island by storm. He must know that three men and these Indians can't hold off a big attack."

"Well," Dan commented, "how many Mounties do you think there are in Canada?"

"I don't know," Shorty faltered. "About fifty thousand, I guess."

"Huh," grunted Dan. "You see, there are only 2,717 men in the whole Force. They are scattered over millions of square miles—from the U. S. border to Banks Island, near the Pole. The official name for this force is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; they're not "North-West Mounted" any more. But not many people know that. They're a special police force, that's all. It's not a military organization."

A straggling burst of gunfire broke out from the line of rifles.

"Their plane is taking off!" yelled Sergeant Grogan. "Are you ready? All right, see if you can keep it from getting away."

"Okay," shouted Dan, and closed his window. "Buckle your safety belt, Shorty. Here we go."

He opened his twin throttles cautiously, and the big plane bumped over the snow. Then it was zipping smoothly into the howling blizzard, and lifting free into the air. Dan held it in a low climb, banked, and headed for the island.

Below, he could see the charred remains of the bunkhouse, looking gray and dead against the snow. The other buildings were still standing, more or less damaged. He saw the narrow little street almost black with running men, liberated from the various places where they had been tied by the Indians. They were dashing about in confusion, trying to collect their scattered force. The big airplane had just taken off and was climbing slowly and heavily to westward.

"Probably full of wounded," Dan thought. "I'll make him turn back and land on his own field. They've got a doctor there."

"Look down there," Shorty pointed. "A raiding party starting out for the shore. The men are on snowshoes."

"Let Sergeant Grogan take care of them," Dan muttered. "Get ready. Send a warning burst through your guns. We're almost up to them."

Shorty gripped his gun levers and a horrible tattoo cascaded from the Electra's nose. Streams of empty, hot shell cases rolled about the floor beside their feet. Dan gripped the wheel, banked the ship almost over on its side and came diving down at the big biplane at an angle.

He heard the rising wail of the two huge Wasps mounting almost to a scream. Steadfastly he held the ship's nose firmly lined on its target, shouting to Shorty to let go.

Br-r-r-r-r! The guns broke out with a deadly twin stream of hot bullets. Dan could see the line of them blasting holes in the tail, ripping up the side of the

fuselage toward the cabin. Then he lifted the nose and banked around in a tight turn.

There was nothing in Sergeant Grogan's orders about killing these men in cold blood. That was Varkofsky's specialty. Dan knew he had command of the situation, and that another burst would do the trick.

They were firing with a Thompson gun out of a cabin window, but it was useless. Dan wheeled the Electra high in the wintry sky, and came swooping down like a falling bomb, while his motors raised their voices to a high-pitched wail. Again Shorty's fist gripped the levers.

He saw the wavering line of holes racing along the upper wing in a spattering line. Then, by delicate manipulation of his rudder pedals, he sprayed hot slugs over the big motor until its propeller flew off and the pilot hurriedly cut its ignition. Even then, it nearly flew apart before it stopped. Beaten, the great biplane fell off on one wing and aimed awkwardly for the island.

It landed with both motors dead, and its fuselage so full of holes that Dan doubted that it would ever fly again. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he had not intentionally endangered the life of anyone on board. He had set out to make their plane return to the island, and he had done so.

Coasting down in a long glide toward the camp, Shorty suddenly gripped his hand. He pointed.

The Mounties were having their hands full. Reinforcements had come over from the island. There

was a regular procession of running men along that quarter-mile of ice, all headed toward the feeble little Mountie camp.

Behind the ice breastworks, Mounties and Indians alike, were lying prone in the snow working rifles as fast as they could pull the triggers. They were putting up a hopeless battle against the overwhelming numbers of Varkofsky's men.

"Re-load those belts," Dan ordered with a shout. "We're going to do a little ground attacking of our own. We'll swing around and dive down at them from the rear, and shoot up the whole line."

"Just a minute," Shorty grunted, working with both hands to load freshly-filled belts into the hot guns. "Look! Another airplane is coming from the west."

Dan, startled, pulled the ship's nose around to face this new enemy. Sergeant Grogan would have to hold out a little longer. For in the sky was a big plane, rapidly winging its way toward Radium Island.

Chapter XVI

VARKOFSKY ROARS IN TRIUMPH

With a sinking heart, Dan turned from the rescue of Sergeant Grogan and his men to meet the challenge of this new threat.

The ship was many miles away when Shorty's sharp eyes first picked it out of the sky. It was flying toward the island, and Dan was flying westward to meet it. They seemed to rush at each other like hawks.

The newcomer was a trimotor. Dan wheeled and circled it, then laughed and turned to Shorty.

"Why, that's the Mounties' ship," he said with relief. "That's Inspector Grosvenor bringing in some men from other posts. He can find his own landing without our help. Let's get back to the job. Grogan is in a tight spot."

Again the big Electra wheeled about in a tight bank, and came roaring down in a power dive. Dan saw the line of men on the ice below him suddenly leap up into his vision and magnify as he dove down over them. Shorty's fists were tight on the gun-trip levers. Both guns broke out anew with their stuttering roars of defiance. Twin lines of hot steel thrust downward to scatter the invaders like ants. Then Dan pulled up, circled, and prepared to dive again

while a terrific hail of rifle bullets from Varkofsky's men spattered against the ship.

The guns were hot; Dan's hands were stiff from battling the wheel, and he was anxious to land and check up the damage. A quick glance to the ground showed Dan that there was no need for another dive, for Varkofsky's men were beating a hasty retreat. He throttled his overheated motors and aimed for the straggled camp below in a whistling glide. There was a bump as his skiis touched the snow. A moment later the Inspector appeared beside the plane.

"My boy," he told Dan, "Up to now you've practically carried this fight alone. I'm glad that at last we can help you. I've brought eight more Mounties, and as much food as the ship would hold. It's taking off again to fly to Ft. Norman and Wrigley settlement for more. It will also bring a few drums of gasoline for your ship. That plane is our first line of defense."

"And offense too," chuckled Sergeant Grogan. "Did you see the way he scattered 'em out there? If we hadn't had Dan right then, they'd have taken us, sure."

"Come inside the tent out of the cold," the Inspector said. "Shorty can take care of your plane. I want to explain our situation to you."

Inside, the Inspector removed his great fur garments and clapped Dan on the back in a gesture of approval.

"Dan, you're all right," he said. "You've done more than all the rest of us. But now we're approach-

ing the final big push of this war, and it's important that we co-ordinate everything so that each man will be able to act independently if necessary."

Dan nodded. The Inspector continued:

"This position is bad, of course. We're out in the open, opposed to a fortified enemy. We're outnumbered about ten to one. And the enemy realizes by now that the show-down has come. He'll bend every effort to massacre us before we can gain strength enough to attack him."

"I think there'll be a lull for a while," Dan said. "Both sides need a little time to rest, and re-organize."

"Yes, but they'll come back at us twice as strong," burst out the Inspector. "They've a hospital there, and facilities for hot food, and every comfort for their men. Look at us, camped out here. Why, just staying alive and fighting the blizzard takes most of our strength."

Dan realized it. But he was anxious to hear the Inspector's plan. He had once been a Brigadier-General, and handled hundreds of thousands of men in the greatest war in history. He ought to know what to do.

"We have three separate jobs," the Inspector went on. "We've got to keep alive. We've got to get gasoline for your ship, and food for the men. And we've got to defeat that gang of crooks."

The Inspector pulled out a pencil and a notebook.

"Now," he said, "You and Shorty are the air force for this army. Your job is to keep the enemy planes from landing or taking off, and to stop them from

shooting at us the way you shot at them just now. We must have complete command of the air, and we look to you for that."

"Yes sir," Dan nodded. "We'll do our best."

"Thank you," the Inspector returned. "Now, Sergeant Grogan is the line officer. He is in charge of the actual firing line, and the defense of this camp. Sergeant Davies, who just came with me from Ft. Norman, is the supply officer. We'll have to work it that way for a while."

"Whose job is it to attack the island and win the war?" Dan asked.

"Well, now, we'll have to do one thing at a time," the Inspector smiled. "You see, Dan, they've got all the best of it. Any student of military tactics knows that a fundamental rule for any commander who is holding a fortified position is that he should stay there and defend it, and try to lure the enemy into attacking him. He can stay behind his wall and pick us off, you see? Well, obviously we aren't going to attack. And we can't defend this open camp very well, either."

"Well, then, what are we going to do?" Dan queried, nervously.

"We're going to fool them," the Inspector said. "They're probably so mad, and so determined to force things, that they'll come dashing out from behind that wall and raid us as often as they can. Well, we're going to fortify our own camp, and turn the tables. Then we'll have the fortifications to protect us, and they'll be out in the open."

It sounded all mixed up, to Dan. But hour after

hour he kept the motors warm under their canvas hoods, the machine-gun belts full, and ready to take off the moment he heard a plane's motor. The Inspector made the Indians lie down and sleep during the day, but at night he had them digging furiously with snow shovels, heating hundreds of gallons of water, sloshing it over the snow until he had ice barricades many feet thick. He arranged them in a blockhouse formation, with rifle ports, peep-holes, and trenches for the men to stand in for protection.

But nothing happened all night. Early in the morning there was a peppery outbreak from the island, and a spattering of rifle fire. The Indians in the trenches were not disturbed by it. But the Inspector, whose knowledge was greater than theirs, immediately ordered a scouting party to go out and see where the enemy had established a sniper's post.

He was right. He knew that they were merely getting the Mounties' attention off the volunteers who had gone out to set up a machine-gun where it would fire at close-range behind their ice defenses. The Indians came back to report that some Russians were over to the north.

"Keep down, men," warned the Inspector. "If you show your heads, you'll be hit. Ready with your plane, Dan. Our trimotor is coming in, and they might make an attempt to shoot it down."

Dan had been thinking about that little single-motored job. He knew that its pilot, besides being a cruel-hearted renegade, was an expert at its controls. He could fly it like a pursuit ship. And he certainly was no coward. He had backbone. Dan

rubbed his eye where the man had connected with one of his pile-driver blows.

Dan knew that the advantage was with him. He could get around the sky faster than the bigger Electra. And he had the same type of guns!

His pulse was pounding a little as he signalled all clear. He skimmed the snow, lifted, and soared westward, waiting to pick up the Mounties' supply plane and fly alongside it until it landed.

Shorty nudged him. "That's it," he said. "That's the little single-motor job. It's taking off now, and taking off fast!"

"Get ready!" called Dan. "We'll catch him as he circles."

The sleek Electra wheeled in the sky like a great bird, and flashed toward the island. Already the smaller ship was in the air and climbing. Dan got a quick glimpse of many faces uplifted down below, watching him. Everybody on the island had his eyes on this fight.

The single-motor ship whipped into a vertical bank and began a tight circle. Dan and Shorty were upon him, now, Dan lining up the nose and Shorty ready with the guns. Dan nodded. Twin lines of slugs raced toward the single-motored ship. But it ducked out of trouble in a swift climbing turn, and Dan followed to get a chance at its exposed under side.

He saw a few of his bullets hit the mark, but the pilot swiftly came up and over in an Immelmann—half a loop and half a roll. That brought him right-side up, above and behind, and in the best position of

all for attack. He lost no time. He came roaring down at them, both guns spitting deadly streams of Browning bullets.

Dan pulled the ship up in a swift climb, but he knew the rudder had been hit again. Then he banked, circled and picked up his enemy a thousand feet above already diving down on him again. Dan had to work fast. He swung aside, then kicked rudder to bring his nose toward the diving enemy once more. He followed him down. Both guns barked.

"Ah!" gloated Shorty. They'd scored the first direct hit. They'd put a line of bullets through his left wing that smashed one aileron and made a sieve of his left wing tank. But he kept flying on his other aileron and his other tank, fiercely coming back for more in order to get in the deadly fire that would send them crashing to the ice.

The Electra was never designed for stunting. This looping and banking was weakening her whole structure. Dan knew he'd have to finish this fight as fast as he could. Otherwise some part of the plane's structure might let go, and he'd be down in a crash, with the other pilot following him in a power dive with his guns blasting away—at the wreckage!

The Electra chased the enemy plane to ten thousand feet, but still the pilot wouldn't dive. Suddenly he swung over in a fast loop and came plunging down, but his guns were centered on the nose of Dan's ship even as he desperately kicked rudder right and left to dodge.

Dan could feel a withering hail of bullets ripping the fuselage fabric, plunging through the wing, smash-

ing against the tail. He knew he'd have to finish the other plane now. Yelling to Shorty to keep the guns going, Dan started down after the pursuit ship. He had a split-second target just as it was pulling up out of its dive.

That was enough. A burst of bullets smashed their way through the enemy plane's fuselage. The pilot had only time enough to cut his motor before his propeller was twisted to a blob of useless metal by the straight-shooting guns of Dan's plane. He banked, wobbled a bit in the air and headed down toward the island with a dead motor.

"Let's leave him alone, poor fellow," Shorty said. "If he makes that field with a dead stick, he's too good a pilot to kill."

"Right," Dan agreed. "Also, we're about as bad off as he is. I'll have to coddle this ship all the way back. It's about ready to fall apart."

Before he had reached the field, Dan was forced to shut off his own motors. His heart was in his mouth. It was one thing to have the small ship's propeller shot off, and its fuselage perforated like a cheese. They had plenty of repair equipment on the island. But when this huge Electra began to shake and flutter and tremble, that was vastly worse. There was no way to weld tubing, straighten wing trusses, re-balance propellers, and rebuild rudder surfaces up here in an open Arctic camp.

The wounded ship came bumping down to a hard landing, and jumped a few feet in the air. That didn't help its loosened framework. When it finally slid to a stop, the Mountie delegation, led by Sergeant Grogan, raised their arms and cheered.

"Hooray!" they yelled.

"What happened?" asked Dan in astonishment. "Is it the King's birthday or something?"

"No, lad," shouted Inspector Grosvenor. "We're thanking you for a marvelous show that you put on up there. Why, that little single-motor job could fly circles around your big ship, if you'd let him. You've saved us again, Dan."

"I'm glad it held out this long," Dan breathed, in relief. "It's full of bullets. We've got a lot of repair work to do, and we've got to get her ready to fly again right away. We're going after those snipers' posts next."

Another cheer broke out from the hard-working Mounties.

Dan and Shorty set to work, taping up all the bullet holes they could find. They had no regular patching fabric, and were forced to use some adhesive tape from Sergeant Davies' first-aid supplies. That made the ship look as if it had broken out in some strange disease. It was a rash of white spots all over its surface.

Well Dan Perry knew that it would be merely a matter of hours before the other single-motored ship was ready to fly again. Well he knew that this aerial battle would go on, and on, for days or perhaps weeks, until one or the other was destroyed. He began to scold himself for allowing the other pilot to glide back to his island unharmed. He had had him right in his sights and he had let him go.

About midnight, Inspector Grosvenor ordered the pilot of the supply plane to attempt a take-off again, back to Hay River Post for some airplane supplies

that might help Dan. He was to bring back more gasoline and two mechanics to act as night crew to keep the motors warm and ready to take off instantly.

The supply plane got off, finally, but the searchlight followed it and it was the target for a vicious volley of rifle fire from the ice. Only the reddish pin-points of flame from the criminals' guns showed the Indian riflemen where to aim.

All the next day, Inspector Grosvenor kept Dan and Shorty beside the plane ready to take off the moment there was a sign of the other plane's activity from the island. All that night every man remained at his post ready for anything that might happen. And every moment of the time they were showered with a spattering hail of bullets from the hidden snipers, from the machine-guns on the island wall, and from parties of scouts on the ice.

"We'll have to take a chance on a night flight," barked the Inspector on the second night of this unceasing attack. "We've got to silence those snipers. And the only way to do it is from the air."

"Well," Dan told him, "We've got a landing light in the nose of the Electra if it'll work. But if we use it to pick out the snipers, they can take a swell aim right at us. They can hit us before we can hit them."

"Keep your lights off," the Inspector commanded. "Don't fly. Just taxi around on the ice. See if you can put that searchlight out."

"Yes, sir," Dan responded. "Let's go, Shorty."

They removed the motor hoods and started their great Wasp motors. Before they had a chance to

warm them, the yellow eye of the searchlight swung toward them. It was the signal for a yelling, shouting, shooting assault on the plane. Dozens of armed Russians seemed to spring alive on the ice. Machine-guns from the snipers' posts stuttered and chattered. There were shouts from the Inspector and the two Sergeants. The Indians began methodically picking off every enemy they could see, but it seemed as if wave after wave of them surged forward across the ice almost into their defenses.

Dan shoved his throttles forward and spurted out of the searchlight beam. But it followed, relentlessly. The camp was in an uproar. Every man was defending his life now. Dan decided to take to the air and get away from the searchlight's range—to smash it by gunfire from the rear. He managed at last to escape its probing beam of light, and swung in a wide circle toward the island.

Below, the ice seemed alive with reddish tongues of gunfire. Every available man from Varkofsky's island was on the ice, now, massing in a big push which was certainly and surely spelling defeat for the loyal party of defenders on the shore.

Dan could see in his imagination the bulky, bearded body of the arch-criminal, Varkofsky. He was probably in a sentry box along the wall, binoculars at his eyes and a telephone beside his face. He would be shouting orders, yelling at the men to advance—to clean up the Mountie Force.

And he was doing it! How Varkofsky must be laughing—in triumph!

Chapter XVII

THE MOUNTIES LAUGH LAST

WINGING through the blackness of the Arctic night, Dan Perry looked below him and shuddered with horror. It was like one of those terrible nightmares which often causes a sleeping person to groan and wriggle and call out for help.

Those guns down there were spitting flame toward the beseiged Mountie outpost. They were tightening closer. They would be over the ice defenses and upon them within a few minutes.

"Can't we do something?" shouted Shorty. "Dive down on them and shoot them up with our own guns?"

"You forget," Dan retorted, "that in the darkness they can see the exhaust flames of our motors. They can aim at us a lot better than we can aim at them. Our best bet is that searchlight."

As he banked the Electra and swung toward it, Dan had a hurried thought that if he could succeed in putting it out of action, Inspector Grosvenor could move his men out of the line of attack and thus save them from this savage assault.

He roared down over the island toward the searchlight. The defenders must have heard him coming, but obedient to Varkofsky's orders they never waved

its beam from the distant shore. As Dan swooped down in a moaning power dive he saw a few pinpoints of flame from rifles. But Shorty was gripping his gun levers, spraying twin lines of hot steel against the thick lens and the metal shell of the light. The big plane passed over. Dan threw a quick look behind him as he climbed in a fast turn.

The light was intact. From a point behind it he could see the devilish way it lighted up the Mounties' camp across the ice strait. He could see the fur-covered figures running across the ice, brandishing their rifles.

"I'm going to throttle down as far as I can," he told Shorty. "They won't see our exhaust fumes so clearly then. When I get down on top of the light, go to it again with both guns."

Dan cast a quick look at his altimeter and saw that it registered about four thousand feet. He gently pulled back both throttles until the motors were just ticking over. Then, down like an attacking eagle, plunged the big ship, its slipstream roar rising as Dan held the ship in a hurtling dive. He saw the altimeter needle rushing around the dial backward, but he kept his two feet rigidly on the rudder pedals and the nose lined up on that yellow pencil of light atop the strong wooden wall.

The great metal knob of the searchlight seemed to come rushing up toward him. Dan's eyes were narrowed into thin slits, judging his distance and his timing. A deafening roar split the Arctic night as Dan shoved both throttles ahead. Shorty timed his guns for the same moment. The Electra appeared

suddenly out of the gloom full in the beam of light, swooping directly toward it and aiming with both guns at its thick glass lens.

It was like flying out on a lighted stage. Those gunners on the wall couldn't miss a target like that, and they sprang into action the moment the plane's blunt nose appeared. There was a crash and a clatter as the thick lens smashed into a thousand fragments. Bullets from Shorty's guns crumpled and shattered the heavy metal case. The light disappeared. Dan knew instinctively that it never would illuminate the Mounties' camp again.

Everybody on the wall had ducked for cover when Dan's plane came roaring down upon them. But as soon as it had pulled up in a climbing turn of escape they ran for their weapons, took careful aim, and volleyed away into the darkness. The whole force of the assault seemed to have suddenly switched from the Mounties' camp to the fleeing plane.

Dan was climbing a thousand feet a minute, but a bullet can climb even faster than that. They came crashing and smashing through the outer fabric of the fuselage, blasting the tail under a hail of spiteful slugs. Dan felt it leaping and jumping under his rudder pedals. Other slugs rained against the underside of the ship, tore off great patches of fabric from fuselage and wings, ripped up the cabin floor. Grimly Dan pointed the ship toward the enemy fortress again, braving another fusillade of bullets from the wall.

He was heading for the hangar that housed Varkofsky's pursuit ship, intent on keeping the plane

from re-joining the fight. Then Shorty gripped his arm and indicated the wide open hangar doors now directly below them. As they watched, the single-motored plane rushed out of the open doors, down the runway and lifted into the night sky. All this occurred, Dan saw with a heavy heart, while he was banking for another thrust. He didn't have to dive now. He had his enemy in the air, facing him.

"You downed him once! You can do it again!" Shorty told him.

Dan replied tersely: "If I don't, we'll never get back alive!"

Both ships had only their reddish-orange exhaust gases to locate their enemies. There was no moon, no stars, no light at all except the continual flash of rifle fire from the ice below.

Dan saw that the other ship was climbing fast, and he trailed it. Speed was his only advantage. Even in its damaged condition, Dan's ship was mistress of the skies. Only the fastest Army and Navy pursuit planes, and specially-made race planes, could outfly an Electra. This cabin ship, of course, could loop and spin and dodge around much faster than Dan's two-motored transport, but Dan could catch it if its pilot ever flew level for any length of time.

Dan could climb faster than the single-motored job, too. He saw that he was overtaking his enemy, and nudged Shorty in a silent command to stand by with his guns. The single faint plume of gas that marked his target was almost dead ahead.

"Now!" Dan barked.

The guns broke out in a staccato chattering. The

whole nose of the ship trembled as the guns erupted into life.

"Missed," Shorty snorted. "The foxy old cuss looped."

The other pilot was cautious about coming to grips with the Electra. He had had a bitter taste of the effectiveness of its guns and the masterly skill of Dan at the controls. He was learning to respect the big transport as a fighting machine. He fell back on his ability to dodge and loop. He adopted a straight defensive plan, waiting for Dan to make a thrust that would expose the big ship to a merciless raking of its fuselage, fore and aft.

Dan's only possible chance of a sure, swift victory lay in speed. He would have to keep out of the other ship's line of fire until he caught it straightened out in level flight. Then he must overtake it and hit the mark before the enemy pilot could locate him.

Dan was watching the single-motored enemy far ahead of him, and a mere thousand feet above. He saw him bank to the left, and slide into a figure-8 of investigation. He must have seen Dan. The Electra was zooming up underneath him. Shorty's fingers trembled on the gun trips. The other pilot banked over and swept up in a climbing turn, out of danger. Dan was pushing him higher. Ten thousand feet, and the single-motor job was still playing a safe, waiting game by staying out of reach.

Dan opened the huge motors, and floated underneath him to prod the pilot into reversing position and heading back toward the island. But before Dan

could aim the ship's nose at its target, the other pilot came up and over in a fast loop. Then he shot earthward in a whistling power dive.

"Catch him!" Shorty cried.

Dan shook his head in protest. "I'm figuring that he is diving with full power to trap us into following him down. Then, when he pulls out, he'll loop, you see? We can't loop. Then he'll be right on our tails and shoot us down. Now watch," he warned.

Seven thousand—six—five—four. The altimeter needle was twisting rapidly around its dial, but Dan refused to listen to Shorty's plea to open up and dive in full pursuit. Instead, Dan was coming down at half-speed as if he were coming in for a fog landing at some airport.

"All right, Shorty!" ordered Dan. "Fire away."

Dan's eyes were following that plume of reddish exhaust. He saw it loop. Instead of following, Dan raised the nose and plunged recklessly straight toward his foe. He drove straight for it, upside down, its pilot looking below him expecting to see the Electra dive into the trap. While it was upside down in that half-second of exposed helplessness, Dan saw his chance. He brought the transport almost straight down, both guns chattering and belching flame. Its twin lines of fire converged like streams from a fire hose on the cabin ship's fuselage. As it nosed down to complete the loop, Shorty's gunnery put a splashing line of holes all the way up the fuselage and past the motor. Shorty shut off the hot guns.

"Duck!" warned Dan.

With some final instinct, the other pilot must have clutched his own gun levers as the line of bullets struck him. While it was hanging upside down from its propeller, its own guns sent its streams of hate full into the Electra's nose. The thick shatter-proof glass windows frosted into millions of tiny cracks. Bullets whistled through the compartment all around them. One of them shot part of the wheel out of Dan's hands. Glass from the smashed instrument board dials flew in icy splinters into their faces.

Dan's hands never faltered on the ruined wheel. When it smashed under his hands, he was on the floor pulling out of the dive by yanking back on the control column. The top of the wheel was gone, but with his foot braced against the tubing he yanked back on the control column with all his strength and levelled off. When he sat up, he picked glass out of his cut face and gazed at instruments that weren't there at all.

"Are you hit, Shorty?" he bellowed.

"I don't think so," Shorty replied. "But I sure got a skinful of glass. Wait until I sit up. I guess I'm all in one piece."

"Look down there," Dan pointed, directing Shorty's gaze out of the opened window. They couldn't see through its many-veined surface.

The other ship had spun earthward and plowed into the island near the hangar. Blazing pieces of fabric floating upward away from the fire had kindled the tar roof of an adjoining supply hut, and men were trying to put it out by throwing snow on it.

In the blazing red light flooding the scene he could see a ladder hastily thrown against the building and some buckets of snow being passed up to the frenzied men on the roof.

"This business of war," Dan muttered, "makes me sick. Let's get back. I'm feeling dizzy."

"So'm I," Shorty agreed. "It isn't a very pleasant sight."

They had not even a compass to guide them back. Feeling his way like a punch-drunk fighter toward his corner, Dan guided the battered ship across the ice and circled the Mounties' camp. He had no idea which way the wind was blowing, where to land, or how much distance he had. He didn't even care. He was so exhausted that he was totally indifferent about whether he cracked up or not.

"Where's the wind-sock?" he kept repeating to Shorty. "They ought to have something out there. They ought to give us a chance to get in."

"There you are!" Shorty gloated.

Dozens of Indians, in a long line, lighted pine-knot torches at a signal. That gave Dan his bearings, the direction of the wind, and illuminated the surface for the bumpiest landing of Dan's career.

He set the ship down hard, and almost bounced out of his seat at the force of the bump. Shorty looked at him queerly, but said nothing. The ship flew along the snow on its skiis, and crunched to a stop.

"You go on, Shorty," Dan sighed. "I—I'm tired. I'll sit here."

Shorty did. He hastened down the aisle and

opened the cabin door. Presently he was back with Inspector Grosvenor and a first-aid kit. But Dan was apparently asleep.

When he awoke, he was in a cot inside a tent and the Inspector was bending over him with a bottle of smelling salts.

"You took a bullet right through your fur hood," the Inspector told him. "It tore away a lot of fur and parted your hair. You probably didn't know at the time that you'd been hit. Too much excitement. When it was over, you keeled over too. I'm glad you stayed awake long enough to land the ship."

"Well," Dan muttered. "How have your men been? How many were killed by that assault? How have you been making out?"

"We're all right," laughed the Inspector. "We just dug in and took it, that's all. No casualties. We can't afford to risk our men the way you risk your own neck. I was going to let you sleep until that headache is over, but I woke you up to tell you the good news."

"What good news?" Dan repeated, blinking his eyes.

"We're ready for the big push," the Inspector barked. "All our men are waiting for the command. We're going to take that island by frontal assault on the wall, the most idiotic maneuver known to military science. But the Old Man has a trick up his sleeve. Want to watch it?"

"Do I?" shouted Dan, trying to sit up. "Do I? Just—ouch!"

"Just take it slowly and easily," the Inspector said,

kindly. "While you were cutting off their chief weapons—that light and that plane—we've been preparing. We can do it now in comparative safety."

"The big push," Dan repeated, to himself. "Here's where the Mounties drive those crooks entirely off the island. Gosh. I certainly was afraid that Varkofsky had us by the neck. But it's the other way around, now. It's the Mounties' turn to laugh now!"

Chapter XVIII

SURRENDER!

It was nearly noon when Dan awoke and saw Shorty already at work on the plane. He had demounted the entire instrument panel and was picking flattened blobs of metal out of the wrecked interior.

"Slugs," he remarked. "How'd you like to have a few of them in your liver?"

"One creased my scalp," Dan grinned, rubbing his bandaged head. "That's close enough. Lucky for me that it hit somewhere like that."

"Yeah," agreed Shorty. "It couldn't hurt you there. Nice thing about being thick-skulled. So are the apes, they tell me."

Dan showered him with a shovel-ful of fine snow. Shorty gasped, and began pawing the snow out of his fur parka as the Inspector approached. The officer motioned the two youths to accompany him. He pointed out something that seemed at first glance to be a high log fence. The logs were split down the middle and stood erect about six feet high, held together by cross-pieces. It wasn't until the Inspector pointed out to him the object of all this that Dan Perry saw that each section was a complete unit. They were thick log shields, some six feet high, four

feet wide and at least eight to ten inches thick. Each unit was mounted on a dog-sled, and carefully fitted to protect the person behind it.

"I told you the Old Man had a trick up his sleeve," remarked the Inspector. "It'll be dark about five o'clock. When they begin leaving their posts for the evening meal, we'll be ready."

Dan borrowed the Inspector's binoculars and viewed the island through them. He saw, in the glasses, a row of machine-guns on the wall and a line of silent, motionless men watching their camp suspiciously.

Behind their ice barricades, the Indian sentries were fingering their rifles in anticipation. Occasional outbursts of firing from one side or the other continued throughout the afternoon. Inspector Grosvenor was inside his own tent, his men grouped around him, when Dan entered.

"I want you to volunteer," stated the Inspector. "I want every man in my command who trusts me, to say so. If you'd rather stay behind here and lead the Malemute Indians in their portion of the action, you have my permission. I want only those men who are willing to go through with this, to start it. Let me see a show of hands."

Every hand seemed to be in the air. The Inspector nodded solemnly.

"Thank you. I appreciate it. I'm going with you, so I'll be out in front where a commander belongs and not sending messages from the rear. I'll have to detail three of you to handle the Indians. Ah, Sergeant Davies, Constable O'Hara, Constable Lock-

erbie. Three fighting Irishmen, too. You men wait for us to get across, then bring your Indians out of the ice barricades and follow us. Not until then."

"Dan, will the ship fly within an hour or so?" Sergeant Grogan asked.

"Well," smiled Dan, ruefully. "I guess it'll stay in the air, but it has no instruments to control it; no windows to protect us from that propeller blast, no way of telling what it might do."

"Did that fight jam up your guns or propellers?" another asked.

"No, they're all right. I'll fly it if it will help out here. But I'd rather go over the ice with you fellows."

"I want you to fly," the Inspector told him. "Not for very long, you understand. I want you to take off, climb to ten or twelve thousand feet, and come down in a speed dive over that wall and lay down a barrage with your machine guns. While you're doing that we'll bring up our force from this side. That'll help us approach closer than we could without your help."

"Very well, sir," answered Dan, "I can do that. But I'll have to ask you to release me from any power dives. With the ship in the condition it's in now, a long power dive from ten thousand feet would shear off those wings as if they were made of cardboard. But I'll fly over across the lake and hedge-hop along the ground. Then I'll suddenly appear over the island, right on top of them."

"Good enough," nodded the Inspector. "Well, gentlemen, are you ready?"

A prolonged shout of agreement broke out from the Mounties.

"Take your posts," barked the Inspector. As they filed outside, his strong voice came booming across the open snow to them, ringing with the authority of the natural-born leader.

"MacNeill! Take Number two at the extreme right. Graham! Number four. Hosford! Number five. Extra clips and first-aid packets in your pockets? Grogan! Center position. Davies! Get your men into the pits. Heads down until you see the signal. Dan Perry! Ready?"

Dan looked at Shorty, who nodded.

"Ready, sir," he reported.

"Fine. Take off whenever you can."

Dan climbed into the ship and took his seat. The side panels of the pilot's window were still out, but Shorty had cut new glass for the front panels from the cabin windows. The white-veined shatter-proof glass he had taken out of the front windows had been transferred to the rear. The only instruments that remained in action were the oil pressure gauge, the motor thermometers and the switches. There were no tachometers, no altimeter, airspeed meter, clock, fuel gauges, or even a compass to navigate by.

Dan settled his goggles around his eyes and moved the throttles ahead. Obediently, the ship gathered momentum and took the air. It flew rather one-sidedly. He had no tachometers to synchronize his motors and had to do it by the sound, and by the feel of the rudder. The ship felt slow, and wobbly. He would take no chances with it.

In a few moments he had crossed the great open expanse of the lake and headed north, out of sight of the watchers on the island. Then he throttled, and came down until he was only ten feet above the ice.

"Here we go, Shorty," he said to his loyal partner.

"Here's luck to both of us," Shorty grinned back.

Only a short distance from the island, Dan lifted the Electra's nose a few hundred feet and then came hurtling downward in a screeching dive across the island's settlement.

Shorty's nose guns were hurling twin streams of steel. They were blasting roof-tops, smashing telephone lines, exploding light reflectors. As he shot toward the wall, Dan fish-tailed hard on his rudder to swing the nose abruptly right, left; right, left. Then he was roaring over the wall and out beyond. He lifted the nose to climb. Shorty instantly shut off the smoking guns and turned to thump Dan on the back triumphantly.

"That's timing," he laughed. "They were right there on the dot."

The line of wooden shields was only a hundred yards away from the wall. Dan's surprise attack had kept the gunners on the wall running up and down to seek some sort of cover.

As Dan urged the weakened Electra into a gentle banked turn, he saw smoke pouring upward from the edge of the wall. He saw Mounties standing in the safety of their heavy wooden shields and throwing what seemed to be grenades, with a wide overarm swing. When they struck the wall, Dan would see

flame. The whole wall was soon a blazing, roaring bonfire.

"I'm going to land and follow on foot," Dan told Shorty.

"Hurry up," Shorty urged. "I don't want to miss any of this."

Dan idled his motors and aimed for the runway at their own camp. By the time he had drained the hot motor oil and staked down the ship, Sergeant Davies had received the flare signal to advance with the Indians.

Dan and Shorty followed the hate-crazed Indians in a headlong dash over the ice strait. They dodged around the end of the burning wall and charged into the enclosure, searching deserted buildings, and rounding up fleeing members of the bearded Russian's huge force.

Inside the main warehouse the two chums saw a group of Varkofsky's men huddled against a wall, their hands up in surrender. Not a single Mountie was on guard there. The captives were in charge of Indians, who enjoyed themselves by pulling their captives' noses, and throwing knives in whistling arcs past their ears to land with a dull thud in the wooden wall. There was scant danger that any of them would try to escape while that was going on, Dan saw.

"Where's the Inspector?" Dan shouted to Shorty.

"Let's find him. Hope he's all right," Shorty rejoined.

The hurried search began anew. Dan in the lead, Shorty panting at his heels, they ran from building

to building, searching, shouting and looking for clues. They found plenty of clues to bitter, hand-to-hand fighting. But the Inspector and the Mounties were gone.

A cold fear grew in Dan's heart. He knew that if the Mounties tried to follow their enemies inside the tunnel, it would be ridiculously easy for a handful of Varkofsky's men to mow them down from one of the connecting corridors. It was the worst trap on the island. Calling to Shorty to hurry, Dan ran along the pathway toward the crusher mill and the terminus of the narrow-gauge railway.

He could see a few Mounties standing idle before the great doors of the mine tunnel, which were closed and locked from within. At the same time the Mounties saw them. Inspector Grosvenor beckoned.

"He can't get in," Dan told Shorty. "They've probably got the rest of 'em bottled up in there, but they can't budge those doors. I'll go down and talk to him, Shorty. You see if you can start this Diesel engine."

"That's an idea!" said Shorty.

Dan plowed through the drifted snow along the edge of the tracks toward the party of Mounties gathered before the great doors. The Inspector barked:

"Look here. We've got all the ringleaders of this gang inside the tunnel. But those blasted doors are too stout to crash in. We can't even burn the bloody things. Do you know where there's an ax about?"

"Better than that, Inspector," smiled Dan. "Get

out of the way, sir. Better move off the tracks, boys. All right, Casey Jones!"

He hoisted his arm and signalled to Shorty. The sturdy Diesel locomotive was in its usual position at the head end of the line of cars, and when Shorty started it, the cars began to move backward with the locomotive at the rear. All the heavy steel ore cars were ahead of it. And Shorty was opening it up as far as the throttle would go, jumping off into the snow when it came clattering around a slight curve.

The line of ore cars was wriggling toward them down the track, gathering speed with every yard it travelled. Faster and faster it thundered toward them. Its hundreds of tons of steel cars were swaying, banging, rushing down at the tunnel entrance with the force of a battering ram.

"Look out!" warned Dan. "Get clear!"

With a crash that shook the entire hillside, the foremost car shattered the double doors. Plowing relentlessly through, the powerful Diesel engine kept on going even after the doors had come down. Chunks of shattered wood fell across the cars and were carried inside. By the time the Diesel engine had chugged up to the entrance there was a hole in the doors big enough to drive a truck through.

"At 'em, men!" barked the Inspector. "Follow me!"

With a yell, the Mounties disappeared inside. Dan and Shorty followed, automatics drawn. The sudden blackness of the interior after the semi-twilight

outside confused them for a moment. Shots were banging and crashing around their ears. The acid sting of gunpowder assailed their noses. Suddenly a running figure darted past them, leaping toward freedom outside. Dan and Shorty both made a flying leap and brought him down in a heap of furs, and dust.

"Bring that man back here!" roared the Inspector. "We've got the rest of the blighters. Grogan! Call those Indians."

"Ah, Count Boris Talaroff!" greeted Shorty derisively as the man called "Excellency" was led away. "Fancy meeting you here. Well, well. It's a small world, isn't it? How's your pal Varkofsky?"

"Varkofsky?" repeated Dan. "Yes! Where is he?"

"He was here when we took the wall," shouted Grogan, shielding his face from the heat of the flames that now burst from every building, "because I got a shot at him. Big guy with a beard, isn't he?"

"Yes. I've got to find him," shouted Dan. "Inspector! Let's get all these fellows together and make 'em talk. Varkofsky's gone."

"We'll soon see to that," barked Inspector Grosvenor. "Sergeant Grogan, let the Indians take these fellows to the warehouse. The rest of you men deploy in a wide circle and search every building on the island. Get in anywhere that the flames will allow. If Varkofsky's here, I want him—dead or alive!"

Dan dashed recklessly into the burning remains of one building after another. He searched the whole

island carefully. He poked into the remains of the crusher mill, to see if his enemy might be concealed in any of the machinery. He combed the entire settlement. Following in his wake, the Mounties pawed aside furniture, overturned beds, and tore with ruthless determination into every square foot of each building that had not already been reduced to charred ashes. Varkofsky had escaped.

"Did you find him?" shouted the Inspector as they returned.

They shook their heads. He turned to the room crowded with silent captives.

"Anybody know where that man is? Speak up, blast you."

Not a man moved.

Dan's sharp eyes picked out his old jailer, the English renegade called "Mike." He made him come forward and face the Inspector. He lowered his eyes in shame. Finally Dan asked him the question.

"Aha," erupted the Inspector. "A Cockney, eh? Well, my man, you seem to have gotten yourself into bad company, eh? But after all you're a British subject, what? Speak up. I'll see what I can do for you."

"Beggin' yer pardon, sir," faltered the man, "I know where 'e is. I saw 'im jump into a dog-sled and make fer the open ice, sir. 'E were alone at the time, sir. Not a 'arf 'our ago, sir."

"What?" erupted the Inspector. "He did? Which way did he go?"

"Back o' them sheds, sir. Straight north, sir. When your gentlemen came out from be'ind them

there shields I suppose he made a run fer it, sir. But it's bad country north o' here. 'E's a killer, sir, and I know 'e'll fight like a rat if 'e's followed."

"No doubt," admitted the Inspector. "No doubt whatever. Well, Grogan, you attend to the mopping up. Have the Indians remove the prisoners to our camp and set a twenty-four-hour guard over 'em. H'mmm. What to do about Varkofsky. Can't let him escape, of course. I have it. Oh, Grogan!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Pick out six of the strongest Indians who are familiar with this country to the North. Outfit them with dog teams, provisions, guns. Send them out at once on his trail. I want him brought back."

Chapter XIX

VARKOFSKY'S DEATH THREAT

WHEN Sergeant Grogan translated the Inspector's order into the Indian language, the effect on the Malemute faces was one of great joy.

They chattered among themselves to select the group of their number to do the job. They began fingering their razor-edged knives. Those who had rifles snatched up extra clips of bullets and jammed their pockets. At length they announced they were ready.

"The detachment is formed, sir," reported Grogan, doing a smart about-face and saluting Inspector Grosvenor. "Although I do say that this Russian hasn't a Chinaman's chance. These redskins will have his hide off'n him before they get back. They think you're joking when you said to bring him in alive. They think you can't mean that, sir."

"Well, I do mean it," rasped the Inspector, fingering his white mustache angrily. "The man must stand trial. We must see to it that he is in condition to stand up in the prisoner's dock. I admit your point, Grogan. The beastly savages will ambush him and torture him to death."

"They'll certainly no' bring the mon back healthy," MacNeill said.

"Confound it," exploded the Inspector. "I seem to be changing my mind constantly. I haven't been so infernally spineless since I had my first command nearly forty years ago. But I suppose I'll have to give that idea up. It wouldn't do, of course, to have him skinned alive or anything of the sort. Some white man must do the job. Some Mountie."

"I'll volunteer, sir," sang out Constable Graham, and he was joined by a chorus of others. The whole detachment wanted to go.

"Embarrassing," observed the Inspector. "Quite. I'd like to oblige each of you gentlemen. But we've taken approximately eighty prisoners. We'll have to stand guard over 'em in our camp, until we've flown the last man out. It's twelve hundred and seventy miles to Edmondton, and that's the nearest place where we can hold a Crown court. It'll take a couple of weeks or more to get all these prisoners down there. I can't spare any of you from guard duty to chase Varkofsky."

Dan Perry was looking at Shorty, and Shorty was looking at Dan. Their eyes met in a single, terrible question. Dan's face was breaking forth in icy-cold beads of moisture at the very thought of what he knew he was going to say. He swallowed two or three times. Then he spoke.

"Well,—uh—that is, how about me, Inspector?"

"Ridiculous!" scoffed the grizzled old commander. "Why, you couldn't see him from the air against that snow. By the time you'd landed, he——"

"No, sir," Dan corrected him. "I mean, to trail

him with a dog team the same as your men would. To try to bring him back alive."

The Inspector looked quizzically at Dan, and shook his head sadly.

"My boy," he implored, "please be reasonable. Please remember that you've had enough. You can't stand much more. Taking the trail with a dog team in this country isn't like sitting in an airplane cabin. And Varkofsky could lie in wait for you—or attack you. No, son."

"I think I could bring him back," protested Dan.

"How? Why, the man would kill you with his bare hands if he ran out of bullets."

"No. No, sir. He wouldn't. Besides, I have a personal reason for asking you, Inspector. He said I'd die ten thousand times before he was through with me. I'm just curious to see whether he can make good."

A deafening roar of deep-chested laughs and guffaws broke out.

"Another experiment, eh?" smiled the Inspector. "Well, I suppose you know what you're doing. If you're not back in three days, I'll send out an ice patrol party looking for you. I hope they find you alive."

Cold beads of perspiration broke out on Dan's forehead. He was trembling. He was scared. He knew it would be the most dangerous encounter of his life.

Shorty, solemn and silent, threw an arm about Dan's shoulders and gripped his hand. There was

a suspicious filminess in the corners of Shorty's eyes, too, which he made no effort to conceal. Then Shorty said:

"You're the only man who can really do the job, Dan."

That was a stimulating tonic. It made Dan feel better.

Varkofsky had nearly two hours' start by the time Dan was ready. He stood beside his polar sledge, his six dogs in harness and ready, as Inspector Grosvenor and the Mounties filed past to say goodbye. They firmly believed that he would never return. Inspector Grosvenor told him bluntly that if anything happened to him, they would track down Varkofsky themselves as soon as they could spare a party of men from guard duty. Dan knew they'd get him, too. Wherever Varkofsky might hide himself on the surface of the earth, a Mountie would track him down and find him.

But Dan was a Mountie now, with a badge, handcuffs and full equipment. He had been deputized by the Inspector to give him full legal power to make the arrest if he got a chance.

Shorty had pleaded to go, but Dan asked him as a final favor to stay and repair the ship so that it would fly safely.

Dan took his place behind the sledge and gripped the handles.

"Goodbye," he shouted, waving his gloved hand. "All right, you huskies. *Mush!*"

The sledge started with a jerk, and Dan trotted along after it. The trail was still visible in places

where the wind had not wiped it out. Dan let the dogs follow the trail. They seemed to know where they were going. He had all he could do to keep up.

After he had cleared the island and struck off across the ice, he tried standing on the rear runners of the sledge and letting the dogs pull him. They could do it as long as he was on the wind-swept ice. But when he struck the deep snow along the northern edge of the lake he had to get off. The dogs tugged and strained, but couldn't move him.

Dan stopped them and went ahead to try to pick up the trail. The dogs immediately curled up in big furry balls in the snow, apparently asleep. Actually, they were just keeping the wind and the driving snow out of their eyes and muzzles. Dan probed along the shore for a mile or more in both directions before he found the twin lines of Varkofsky's sledge. Then he shouted to his dogs. They jumped up and leaned their weight into their harness. The sledge moved bumpily into the bushes along the shore and climbed slowly along the vast shoulder of a naked mountain. Hours passed—hours of slow, agonizing progress. Dan posted himself at the head of the lead dog, guiding him by a touch of his hand on the collar of his harness. The twin lines of Varkofsky's sledge were deeper, and plainer. He was gaining!

When the time came for him to make camp, Dan followed the Mounties' instructions. By that time he could see the only possible trail that Varkofsky could take. He noted that the arch-criminal would have to bear northeast and up into the jagged peaks of the mountain range to find a pass which opened

into a valley below. Across that valley was the roaring Mackenzie River, tumbling and cascading its way toward the Arctic Ocean. About a hundred and forty miles down the valley, on the other side of the great river, lay Good Hope settlement.

It was Dan's job to catch Varkofsky before he could arrive at Good Hope. The Russian evidently had plenty of money. He could hire an airplane to fly him to the Gulf of Alaska where his white cargo ship lay waiting. That would be the end of Dan's quest. But it would be the beginning of Varkofsky's trail of revenge.

The Mounties had told him to lie back and allow Varkofsky to pitch camp. Varkofsky was no experienced sledge-driver. He'd probably build a fire to cook his food, and Dan could see it for fifty miles in that super-clear Arctic night, especially if Varkofsky were camped above him on the route to the pass.

Thus, Dan called a halt to his exhausted dogs when he no longer could see the trail. He set up his tent, started his smokeless Primus stove and prepared supper. He unharnessed his dogs and distributed great chunks of frozen fish for their food. Afterward, he came out into the clear Arctic night with a pair of binoculars, searching for a reddish pin-point that would show him Varkofsky's camp-fire.

Late at night, he found it. The man was many miles ahead, evidently making much better time than Dan himself. Dan knew at once that unless he overtook him at once, Varkofsky would make good his escape.

He aroused the snarling dogs, harnessed, and struck camp. With only three hours' sleep he took up the dim trail again. He forced himself to stagger through the howling, shrieking wind hour after hour, while the reddish pin-point of Varkofsky's fire grew larger and larger as he approached.

Finally, so exhausted that he could scarcely stumble a foot farther, Dan halted his dogs and lay down beside the sledge in a sleeping-bag. When he awoke, it was mid-morning. The wind had died away somewhat. Varkofsky's camp-fire was gone.

Again Dan furiously took up the trail, shouting and calling to the straining huskies, pushing on the sledge-handles to help them up the steep shoulder of the mountain. At noon he halted on the highest ridge, in the pass, and scanned the immense Arctic valley with his glasses.

His heart skipped a beat. Varkofsky was a scant two miles below, hardly on the valley floor. He was striding along furiously, whipping and lashing his dogs, pulling the lead dog's collar to make him go faster.

The dogs were so exhausted that even as Dan watched, the lead dog lay down and tried to snap at Varkofsky's ankle. The other dogs at once followed their leader. The whole line of them lay down and curled up.

As Dan excitedly yelled to his team and started down the slope, he could see Varkofsky striding up and down the line helplessly.

Dan's own dogs were scampering merrily down the trail, their white tails bobbing rhythmically back

and forth. Dan clung to the handles and rode the sledge-runners down the long, wind-swept incline. Varkofsky and his dogs had broken the trail. Dan had easy going.

Suddenly Varkofsky heard the barking and yapping of Dan's dogs far up the mountainside. He whirled. Dan saw him clutch his binoculars. But Dan shielded his face so that the bearded crook could not see his features. Varkofsky acted instantly, on the assumption that any sledge-team overtaking him in this unexplored valley must mean trouble.

Dan's dogs were running swiftly along the trail straight toward him. Dan was unslinging his rifle with one hand while he clung to the sled with the other. Varkofsky, with his great strength, tipped his sledge over on its side, lay down behind it and thrust his rifle over the top.

Dan yelled at his dogs to halt. Before Varkofsky could aim, he had leaped to the leader's collar and steered him aside. When the first shot banged out, with a clattering echo among the hills, Dan had his dogs circling Varkofsky's tiny little barricade. But Dan himself was on foot, rifle in his hand, plowing through the deep snow to a crag behind which he could command Varkofsky's position without exposing himself.

Instead of showing himself from behind the crag, Dan began tightening the circle of his fire. He took long, careful aim, and sent a slug whipping through Varkofsky's fur hood. With another he shot off the Russian's pistol holster, its webbed belt ripping to shreds. He saw that Varkofsky was terrorized. The

criminal roared forth hysterical pleas for Dan to stop firing.

Then, and not until then, did Dan decide to have it out with him. He matched his smaller size and weight against the Russian's fear of his unerring marksmanship. Coming boldly out from the protection of the crag, Dan approached with his rifle aimed at Varkofsky's heart.

"I'm the man," Dan said, "you promised to hunt down. Remember, you said you'd make me wish I had never seen Angus and his gun? Well, I'm here. And I'm taking you back with me. I'm ready for any of your rotten tricks."

"It's you!" roared Varkofsky. "Right here in my hands."

"Not yet," snapped Dan, prodding the Russian with his rifle. "Turn around. Put your hands behind your back. I'm going to try to take you back alive, Varkofsky, but if you want to try something, go ahead!"

"*You'll* never take me back, you pup," sneered Varkofsky.

As Dan set his rifle down, Varkofsky whirled and leaped full upon him like a giant Kodiak grizzly bear. Dan went down under the impact, but he landed on his back with his feet up. He kicked hard. Varkofsky, with a grunt, staggered backward. Then Dan was up, but Varkofsky had whipped out a knife and hurled it straight for the boy's heart. Dan dodged, but Varkofsky caught him off balance with his gigantic fist full in Dan's mouth.

Again Dan sank into the snow, with the leering

face of Varkofsky looming above him; the small, pig-like eyes bloodshot with savage rage. Varkofsky lunged and Dan rolled over. With the butt of his .45 automatic he walloped Varkofsky on the head.

The Russian staggered and leaped at Dan again. His younger opponent was on his feet, steeling his body for Varkofsky's next blow. Dan drove a hard left to his enemy's chin.

Varkofsky charged and plunged all his weight upon Dan, bearing him down into the deep snow again. There was snow in his eyes, in his mouth. He couldn't see. Varkofsky had his powerful hands inside Dan's fur hood. His fingers tightened about his throat.

Dan, with his last gulp of air, fought and struggled to raise his knees. He brought them up to his chest, lifted his feet, and with a grunting shove broke Varkofsky's grip and hurled him backward. The world was reeling about Dan's eyes as he staggered to his feet. He saw the bulky form of his enemy leaping at him again.

He dropped flat in the snow and Varkofsky tripped over him, to land sprawling on his face. This time Dan was up, first. This was the time to use his ace—to play his final trick that he was saving for the climax. He whipped off his gauntlet and with his right hand reached inside his left sleeve.

He had a long dog whip hidden up his sleeve, across his shoulders and down the other sleeve. With a jerk it came free. As Varkofsky clambered erect and faced him again, Dan cracked this whip in

his face. He sent it snaking through the air with a swish, criss-crossing every exposed part of Varkofsky's body with stinging darts of pain. That whip took all the fight out of Varkofsky and brought his immediate and complete surrender. Dan was so exhausted he had to work half an hour to tie his helpless captive aboard his sledge.

Two days later, with no stops for sleep, Dan saw through glassy eyes the Mountie camp ahead of him across the ice. He guided his dogs along the final mile. While he still could see, he brought them alongside the tents into a shouting, cheering line. Dan stopped his team and swayed in exhaustion against the sledge-handles.

"Well," he told Inspector Grosvenor, "Here he is!"

The men cheered Dan again. They crowded around him, clapping him joyously on the back. Others unfastened the lashings and lifted the half-frozen giant from his sledge. Inspector Grosvenor lifted a hand.

"This," he said, "is the greatest individual act of heroism I have ever seen in the North. I made Dan a Mountie before he started on this dangerous mission. He is wearing a badge I gave him. I'm going to send a report to Ottawa recommending him for the greatest honor a Mountie can receive—the Victoria Cross! How about it?"

The noise was deafening. To Dan, it seemed impossible that twelve Mounties and fifty Indians could make such an ear-piercing din. They crowded

around him, helping him inside the Inspector's tent, carefully removing his fur garments. One of the Mounties laughed, and pointed.

"He's got two more pistols in shoulder holsters," he pointed out, "and a sheath knife and another length of Eskimo fish-line. Look! He's even got a spare pair of handcuffs! Taking no chances, eh, Dan?"

"Not with that killer," Dan grunted. "He's too big."

Shorty sat down and began unfastening Dan's frozen felt boots.

"Gosh!" he breathed. "You're back, Dan! You did it!"

Dan smiled at him and nodded.

Chapter XX

THE END OF THE OUTLAW TRAIL

After twelve hours of deep and restful sleep, and a gigantic meal of ham, potatoes, hot biscuits and coffee, Dan put on his furs again. He found a shaving mirror somewhere in his bedding roll and examined his split lip to see how it was healing. Satisfied, he went in search of the Inspector.

"We're already loading these fellows out in our trimotor and locking them up in the Provincial jail at Edmondton," the Inspector said, as Dan found him outside watching some of the prisoners march to the plane. "We can handle 'em. It'll take ten days more. Why don't you and Shorty fly to Seward and get your father? You can fly him back to Edmondton and put him in a hospital there. Then all three of you can appear as witnesses for the Crown in the trial."

"He ought to be nearly well, don't you think?" Shorty asked.

The Inspector's face fell. "Well, not yet," he said.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dan, his heart pounding. "What do you know about Dad's condition? Tell me!"

"Varkofsky's bullet hit him in the spine and para-

lyzed him from the waist down. He'll be in a wheel chair for years. Probably the rest of his life. But the doctors there say they are making some progress."

"Paralyzed?" repeated Dan, stunned. "Paralyzed? My dad? In a wheel chair? Why—why, Shorty! Get some gas in the ship."

"All set, skipper," answered Shorty. "If you can fly without any tachometers or altimeter or such. We've got a compass. The Mounties furnished us with one. If you can fly her that way, she's ready."

"I can fly her any old way," barked Dan. "I've got to get there. Climb in. I'll get some grub and supplies."

"It's all loaded. I thought you'd be wanting to go places."

"Thanks, Shorty," burst out Dan. "I'm glad you know how I feel. Well, all right, Inspector. I'll meet you in Edmondton."

"I've reserved rooms for you at the Prince Edward Hotel," the Inspector shouted after him. "Bring your father there."

Dan nodded as he flung open the cabin door. He started the huge Wasps and from force of habit studied the instruments as the motors warmed. There were no instruments. Merely the switches, the throttles, a compass and a couple of oil-pressure gauges that couldn't give him much information about the great motors.

"All set?" he barked at Shorty. "Let's get out of here. I've had more trouble, more grief around here

than I ever expected to see in my whole life. I'm anxious to see the last of it."

Then the sleek transport was skimming the snow and lifting into the air. Dan watched his compass, timing his progress as well as he could with Shorty's wrist-watch. He was heading straight westward, lifting the sleek ship higher and higher until he levelled at ten thousand feet.

"It seems swell not to have to keep looking for an attack," Dan commented to Shorty. "By the way. Where are those machine-guns? What did you do with 'em?"

"Took 'em out and put 'em in the cabin," Shorty said. "We might need 'em again some day. But it would sure look funny if we landed at Seward with a couple of machine-guns sticking out of the nose of a transport."

Coming into the airport at Seward on a long glide, Dan wondered how long it would take them to get home again. He wondered what their family life would be like, with his famous father chained to a wheel chair. He tried not to think of that, as an automobile carried them through the small seaport town toward the hospital overlooking the sea. He tried to keep his pulse down as he tip-toed through the corridors toward his father's room. Gently he opened the door. The room was empty.

"Dan!" called his father's voice from the corridor. "Here I am, son!"

He turned. Something seemed to be choking him. Something seemed to be welling up in his throat as

he saw his once-muscular father wasted and thin, sitting in a wheel chair with a blanket across his lap. He hurried to his father's side, knelt beside him and threw his arms around the frail body in the chair.

"Now, now," his father comforted him. "It isn't as bad as all that, is it? Why, I can have a lot of fun in a wheel chair. Can't I, Suki?"

"Honorable boss say so," answered Suki, glumly. "Mebbe so. Sawbones doctor with goat beard say honorable boss not kicking greatly. Can not kick, he suspect. Mebbe you have fun elsewise. I remark."

"No, I'm not kicking," replied Anson Perry. "I'm alive. From what the Inspector told me by radio I don't understand why you are, son. I told you not to take chances like that. What if I did lose the island? Is it more important to me than my son?"

"Dad," muttered Dan, "I couldn't let him get away with that. Not after what he did to you. I couldn't. And—well, it's fixed now."

"So I heard," chuckled Anson Perry. "Well, Suki has everything packed. We're ready to go back to Edmondton with you. I'm to be a witness at the trial. You can tell me about it on the way."

They had to be extremely careful loading Anson Perry's wheel chair aboard the plane. It wouldn't go in the door, so Dan carried him inside while Shorty took the chair apart and re-assembled it inside the cabin. They blocked it down, and saw that he was comfortable. Then Dan lifted the big ship into the air again, bound for Edmondton.

At the Alberta capital, Dan was met by a uni-

formed delegation of Mounties and an ambulance to take Perry, Sr. to his hotel. During the early stages of the legal proceeding Dan was busy at the Canadian Airways field installing new instruments, repainting the ship, repairing its loose framework and lining up the wings with plumb bob and level. He kept in touch with the various processes of the trial, the selecting of the jury, the taking of statements and marking of exhibits. The Inspector and Anson Perry were busy day after day with legal technicalities, but Dan and Shorty labored on, undisturbed, until the second week.

At the first open hearings in Court, the entire list of eighty-three defendants were first tried on a single count of resisting the authority of the Mounties. They were defended by an Alberta attorney appointed by the Court, who straightway entered pleas of guilty. Each one was sentenced individually.

"But that's just the beginning," Inspector Grosvenor told Dan. "Wait until Varkofsky and five others go on trial for armed revolt."

Anson Perry testified from his wheel chair, telling in a clear voice of his mineral discoveries on the island, of his legal registration of the claim. The original claim was produced from the files, properly documented. Tax receipts to the Dominion government paid by Dan's father were exhibited. Malemute Indians, scared and timid, told through their interpreter, of their seizure by Varkofsky's men; of their captivity on the island; of the deaths of their tribesmen.

Inspector Grosvenor, erect and soldierly, re-

splendent in his red tunic and gleaming leather Sam Browne belt, told of rescuing Dan and Shorty, of the long, bitter fight to dislodge Varkofsky, and of Dan's heroism in his final capture. Dan himself was asked to tell of his first capture by Varkofsky's men, of his escape from the island, and of the manner in which Varkofsky conducted his pirate operations.

Varkofsky's attorney moved for a dismissal of the charge on the ground that the Court had no jurisdiction over the accused man. This was quickly denied, the Judge pointing out that in cases of armed revolt the Court had jurisdiction over anyone who attempted it, regardless of nationality, as long as it exercised authority over the territory in question. The Communist attorney then asked that the trial be transferred to Ottawa, where the accused would be represented by official delegates from Moscow. This was denied. The Judge ruled that since the Mounties had brought the case into his court it would be tried there. His only recourse would be to take an appeal and see if the higher court at Ottawa would sustain it. The case would then be re-tried there if an error appeared in the present Court's procedure.

Dan laughed. The Judge was polite, patient, but firm as a rock. The Communist attorney who had rushed to Varkofsky's defense became angrier and angrier. He had never been so flatly deflated in any other court. It was unbelievable! What about his client's constitutional rights? The Judge replied coldly that under the Dominion flag, an accused man's constitutional rights were protected. He sat

back in his chair and told the defense counsel to proceed.

It was a complete rout for the defense. Beaten at every turn, turned down on every point, piles of damning testimony being quoted against them, Varkofsky and his white-faced leaders seemed to wilt under the accusing weight of evidence. There was not a satisfactory defense of a single point. It was, the Crown attorney told the jury in his summation, what lawyers called an "open and shut" case.

The Judge, in charging the jury, described the law-enforcement methods of the unorganized Northwest Territory, told them that the Royal Canadian Mounted was in complete charge, and that the claim of Anson Perry to the island was indisputably valid. He then described the law governing armed revolt against the Crown, and the penalty. He said that if in their opinion the defendants had actually, by force of arms, taken and held this island against the attempts of the Mounties to dislodge them, they were guilty and there was no other verdict possible. He said that the defendants had not denied their guilt, but had tried to excuse it on the grounds that they were acting for humanity.

"Humanity," he concluded, "is not on trial in this Court. The question before you is whether or not this act constitutes armed revolt."

The jury brought in its verdict of "guilty" without even leaving the box.

Three days later, Varkofsky and his gangsters faced the Judge again, and were sentenced to death.

Before they could leave for home, Dan and his

father, accompanied by Shorty, were obliged to attend a dinner given in their honor. Flanked by Inspector Grosvenor and the Mounties who had taken part, Dan suddenly found himself on his feet amid a burst of applause. The Prime Minister, the Governor-General and the Commissioner who commanded the Mounties were standing before him.

"This honor," said the Governor-General, "is reserved for soldiers of the Crown who perform acts of heroism above and beyond the call of duty. Because you are a deputized member of the Royal Canadian Mounted, you become eligible to receive, from my hand, Britain's highest military award. Daniel Webster Perry, by the authority vested in me by His Majesty the King, I invest you with the Victoria Cross!"

The sound of his voice was being carried by radio across the continent. The Prime Minister next presented Inspector Grosvenor, who received from the Governor-General the jewelled emblem of the Order of the British Empire. Every Mountie who had taken part received a gold medal. For Shorty Keenan there was a gold Military Cross as a reward for his superb gunnery.

"Can you imagine that?" exulted Shorty as they prepared for bed in their hotel hours later. "Look at that medal, will you? My dad fought all through the War and never even got a Croix de Guerre. Wait till he sees this."

"Now that you've got a medal," laughed Anson Perry, "maybe your dad will teach you something about navigation. I'll speak to him about it. You've made a place for yourself, Shorty, in any

future expeditions I may put into the field. Well, Dan, let's pack up the ship and go home. All this high living is a strain on an invalid like me."

"Nonsense, Dad," scolded Dan. "You're not an invalid. When I get home I'll give you better care than any hospital could give you. The doctor said you might eventually walk again. We'll try to make that come true."

"We certainly will," Shorty chimed in.

"Excuse please," added Suki. "Mebbe so Suki can help too."

By an early hour in the morning they were ready to say goodbye. Inspector Grosvenor gave Dan, as a final gesture, his own gold badge of an Inspector's rank in the Mounted. He asked Dan to keep it, and to remember him. The other Mounties who had been through so much with them, shook hands and smiled goodbye to Dan and Shorty. Finally the motors were warming, Anson Perry was safe in his clamped-down wheel chair, and Dan received the take-off signal from the airport tower.

As the ship roared along the runway and into the air, Shorty waved a final farewell from the cabin window. They were headed homeward. In the cabin, Suki set about preparing something for Anson Perry's lunch, while chattering in his sing-song Japanese voice about how there would be nothing in the house for dinner when they got home.

Flying peacefully at ten thousand feet, with the green fields of Quebec and Ontario slipping beneath them, Dan surrendered the wheel to Shorty and sat down near his father for a brief talk.

"I'm worried," he said, "about the thousands of

tons of ore those rascals took out of Radium Island. They must have exhausted the vein. I don't believe there is enough left there to justify building another settlement and going back into production. Do you?"

"My boy," sighed Mr. Perry, relaxing and closing his eyes. "You don't know one tenth of it. Neither did Varkofsky. All the ore that those fellows took out of that island isn't a scratch on the surface. Why, there's enough ore there to supply the world for the next fifty years! I'm planning on developing it with a company of my own."

"Well," shrugged Dan. "Don't send me up there. I've seen all I care to see of Radium Island."

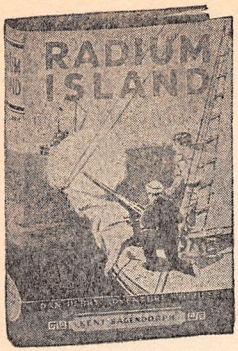
"I don't doubt you have," agreed his father. "I can lease it to a Canadian company on a royalty. I've got other plans for you, Dan. Something in the tropics. I'll tell you about it when we get home."

With a sigh, Dan arose and replaced Shorty at the controls. He located his position and realized that he was almost home again—almost back in his own house. He didn't feel like going into the tropics or anywhere else for a while. He wanted to stay at home. He wanted to revel in the luxury of clean beds, fresh fruits for breakfast, the soft-footed Suki to wait upon him and bring him the morning paper.

That was what a home was for. It was a place to live in, to stay in. Just the same, Dan found his gaze wandering southward, as if to probe the distant horizon and reveal its secrets. The tropics!

He might have a lot of fun down there, at that!

THE END



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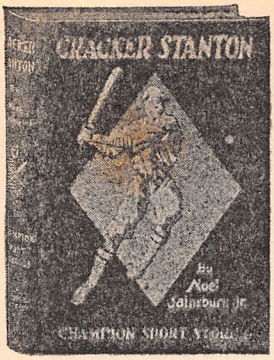

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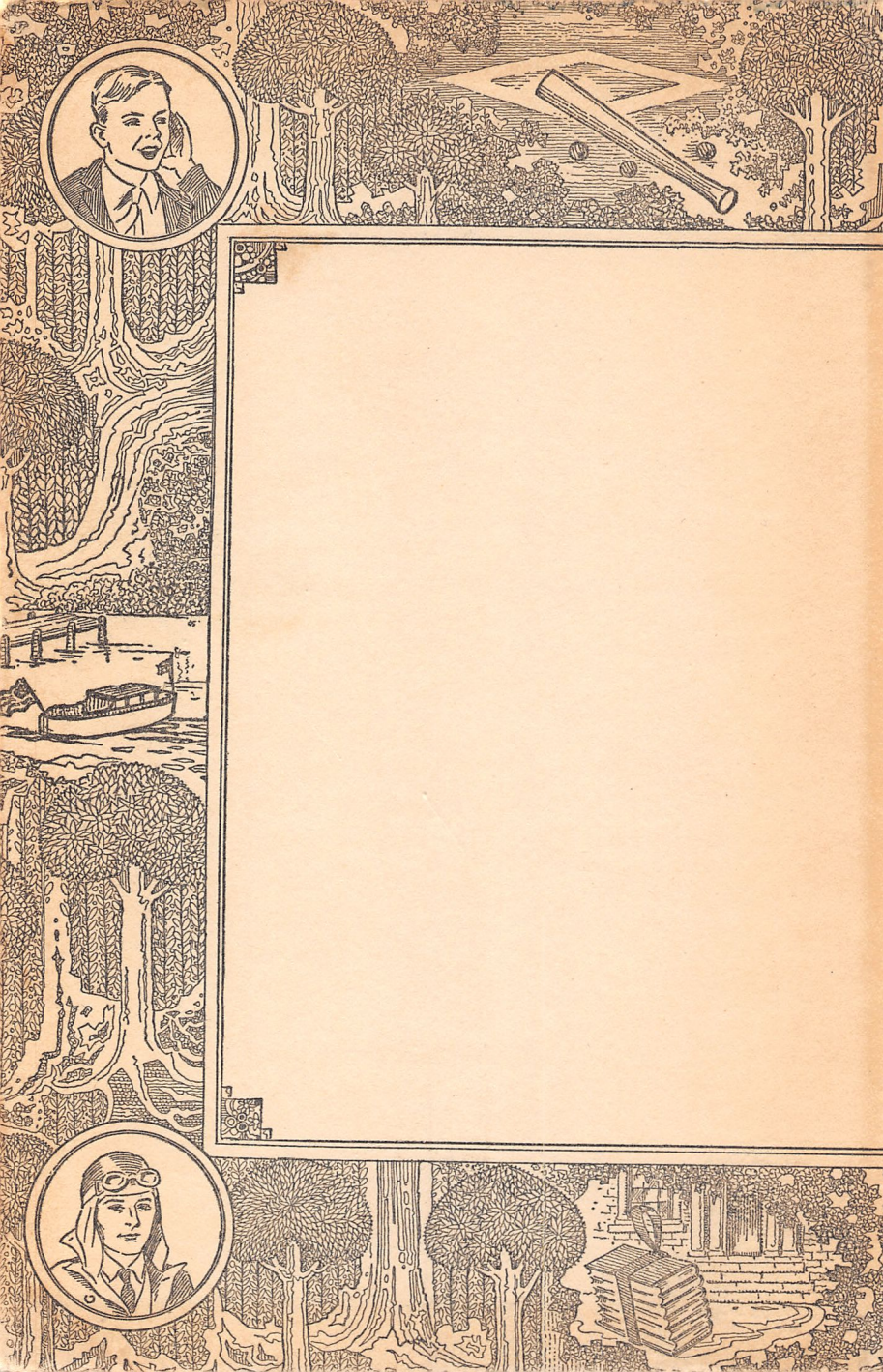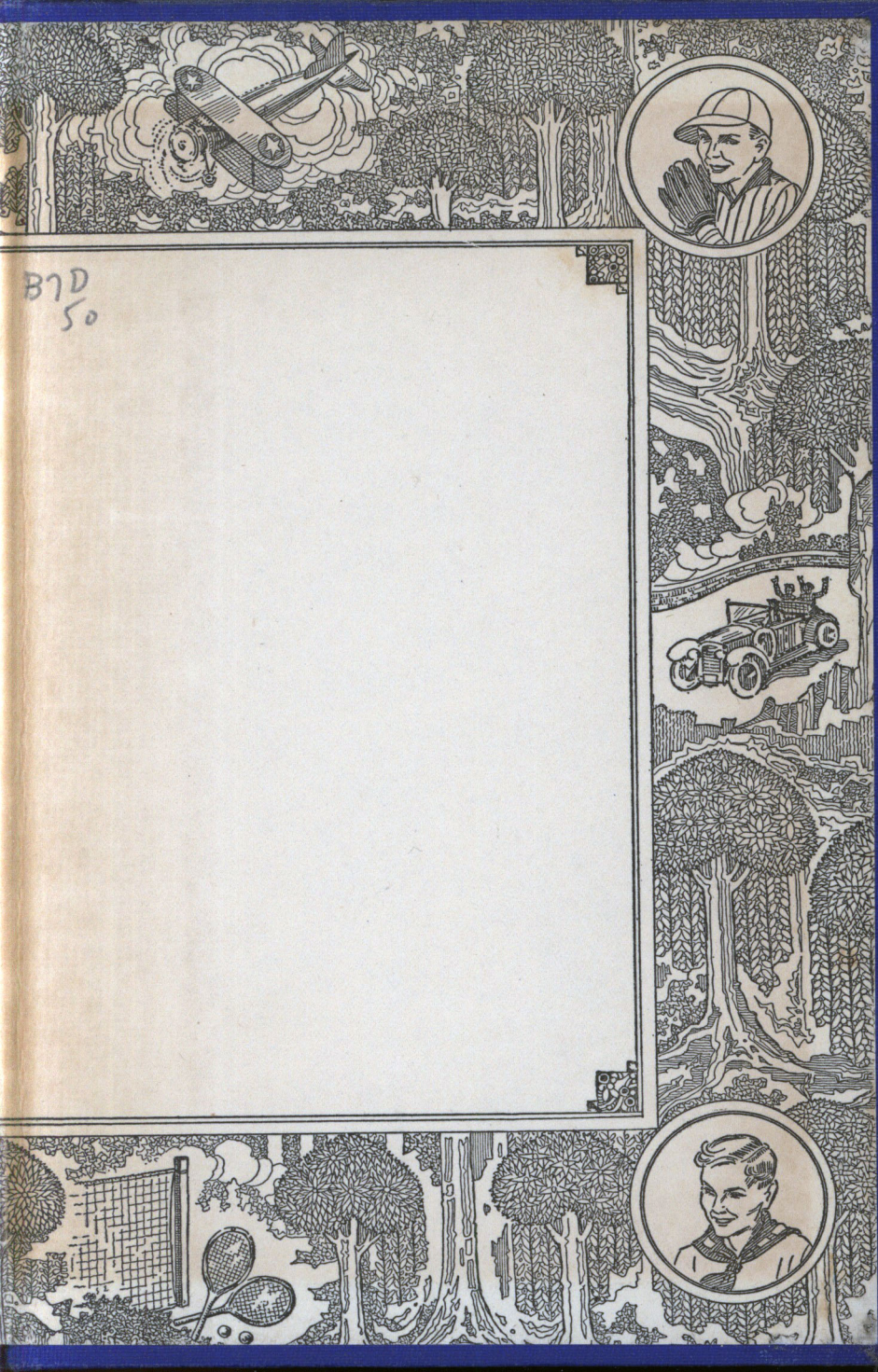
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